



Freshman setter Ashley Petak loads up for a serve during Wednesday night's 3-0 sweep of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The volleyball team is ranked No. 8 in the nation and has won four consecutive matches.

Chris Waller/ Index

VOLLEYBALL | Team beats University of Missouri-St. Louis 3-0 Wednesday night to improve to 13-3 this season

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because it came against a top-10 team, but also because there was so much emotion involved.

"That game was a lot of fun, and everybody was really pumped up," she said. "Not only because they were No. 5 in the country, but because there was a player on their team that looked at coming to Truman, so there was just a little rivalry there."

The back-and-forth game was full of energy and excitement from both teams.

"One of the other coaches put it best," Skoch said. "It was a game of runs. From a fan's point of view it would have been a great game to see because there was a lot of defense and a lot of rallies. ... Especially last week since we weren't playing so well, it was good to get that win."

The Bulldogs were resilient throughout the see-saw battle.

"Even though it was up and down, we always managed to pull ourselves back out of it, which is something that on occasion we've had trouble doing," Leshner said. "It was nice to see ourselves pull back out and do well against a really good team. We were

really fired up for that game because we knew they were No. 5 and we were No. 10."

The Bulldogs also notched another win during the weekend. This one came at the expense of MIAA rival Northwest Missouri State on Friday. Truman rode an impressive hitting percentage of .346 to sweep (-23, -24, -27) the Bearcats. Most importantly, the win moved the Bulldogs to 2-0 in the MIAA.

Leshner led Truman with 16 kills. "It was our second conference match, so it was really important because we won our first one and we wanted to stay unbeaten in conference," Leshner said. "... We were hustling and weren't letting down like we sometimes do."

Skoch said he knows how important conference wins can be because of how the Div. II playoffs are set up. To make the playoffs, a team must finish in the top eight in its region. Right now the Bulldogs are tied for first place in the MIAA East with No. 5 University of Central Missouri.

The Bulldogs will be back in action with two games during the weekend beginning Friday at Southwest Baptist University and then Saturday at Columbia College (Mo.).

OFFENSE | Bulldog hitting percentage key factor in determining wins and losses, team seeks consistency

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Skoch knows that there is cause for concern with these statistics.

"In our games that we lose, we hit [poorly]," Skoch said. "But against Florida Southern, I think we hit really economically considering how good that team is."

Skoch also knows how important playing well all the time is with this team.

"The reason our stats are low right now is because of a lack of consistency," Skoch said. "We beat Florida Southern, but we can't expect to keep beating great teams with our up-and-down play. ... The Jennies already have a lot more individual games won and fewer games lost, so that means they are playing more consistent than us. That is

the stat that concerns me the most."

Skoch also noted that there has been a definite increase in the amount of time spent on offense during practice. "The sole point of practice has been to get better offense and to get more people involved besides Allie [Cherven] and Melissa [Keck] to produce," Skoch said. "I think we are starting to see an effect. ... All practice has been offense, offense, offense. We've been trying to get more role players to produce points for us, not just Allie and Melissa."

Even with the heavy focus on offense, the Bulldogs defense has not suffered. The 'Dogs rank second in the conference with 2.67 blocks per game.

Skoch also noted that often the key to a good offense is having a good defense.

FRESHMAN | Ten first-year players' performances on both ends of the field contribute to men's soccer 5-2-0 season record

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How close the team members have gotten to one another could be proof of the potential they have. Whether by sheer coincidence or by head coach Duke Cochran's recruiting work, they have become a very tightly knit unit, Biggerstaff said.

"I think that the guys [Cochran] has recruited just mesh really well personality-wise," he said.

But with a team dominated by underclassmen with little big-game experience, only time will tell whether they will be able to step up during the stretch run — a run that includes many tough regional opponents. Meagher seems to

think the members are up to the task.

"It was a little rocky at first getting our start, but we figured it out now," Meagher said. "I think we are definitely ready to make a stand and prove that we can make the tournament every year and that we're a very good team."

Cochran said his team is so gifted that he sees a relation to the team he inherited in 2005, his first year of coaching.

"The measuring stick is my first year, when we were sized 11th in the country, 17-3-2, [a] senior-laden team, [and a] very strong team," Cochran said. "The talent we have here is as good as that. It's just younger. I think we

can be as good as we were."

The 2005 team to which Cochran draws comparison lost in the NCAA regional finals in a penalty-kick shootout.

Senior midfielder Drew Vogt is the only remaining player from that game.

Cochran said that despite the youth this team has, it is ready to make an impact this year in postseason play.

"I think the next two or three years are going to be very fun to watch these guys as they get older," Cochran said. "But as far as are we ready right now? Are we able right now? Yeah, I think we are, and we're just going to get better from here."

SOCCER | Freshman scores first three career goals to help 'Dogs garner fourth consecutive victory, all coming via shutout

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"There are no assured spots," Biggerstaff said. "Everybody's fighting for a spot. There is a lot of competition."

Many players said the recent success — winning four straight games — is a direct product of the team starting to build chemistry. Biggerstaff said Cochran brought together a group of guys whose personalities mix together well.

"We've started to mesh a lot more as we get guys more comfortable with each other's style of play," Biggerstaff said.

Cochran said his team is very tight-knit. This could

lead them toward further success this year.

But success is about to become a much more daunting task as the team prepares for an October schedule that features games against five teams with one loss or fewer. Meagher said he thinks the Bulldogs can handle the tough competition as they continue to progress.

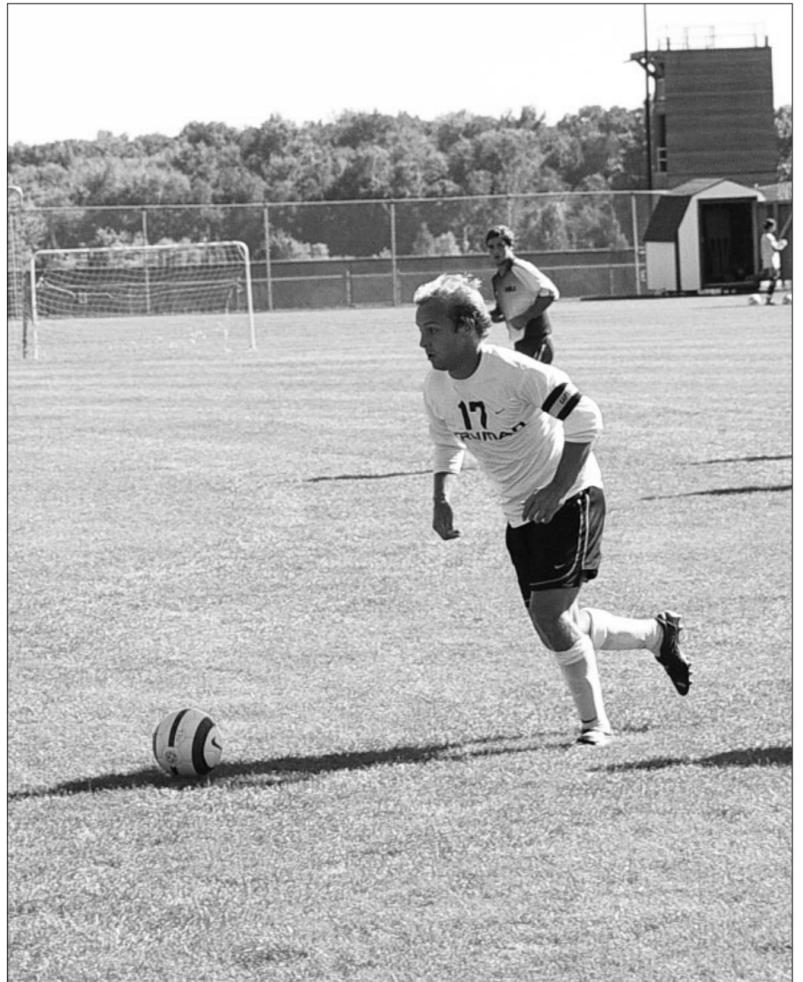
"We have four straight shutouts, which is definitely big," Meagher said. "Our defense is playing really well and we are starting to, especially Saturday, score a lot more goals. I think we're definitely starting to come to-

gether as a team."

The Bulldogs look to continue to gain force as they approach the playoffs. Many players think this team can make a deep playoff run if they stay hot.

"If we can keep the momentum towards October, then it's tournament time anyway," Cochran said. "Win or go home, ... and I think we can handle it."

The Bulldogs will look for their fifth straight shutout Friday night at the University of Southern Indiana (4-4). After that they will take on Kentucky Wesleyan College on Sunday.



Junior Josh Weir advances the ball during the Bulldogs' Aug. 31 1-0 win against Northeastern State University (Okla.). The men's soccer team claimed their fourth straight win on Saturday.

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