

WIN | Volleyball defeats No. 5 Central Missouri, record improves to 16-3, winning streak extends to seven straight

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 a good start in Bolivar as the 'Dogs used a very strong offensive outburst to sweep the Bearcats 3-0 (-18, -26, -20). Junior outside hitter Eli Medina led the attack with 13 kills, while sophomore outside hitter Susie Leshler recorded 12 kills of her own. The play of Medina and Leshler set the pace for the Bulldogs who had 24 more kills, 21 more digs and hit almost 300 points higher than SBU. The win also improved the Bulldogs MIAA record to 3-0, leaving them in a tie with University of Central Missouri for first place in the MIAA East.

The Bulldogs also recorded their highest hitting percentage of the season against SBU at .388, which is a good sign for an offense that has been struggling to find an identity all season.

Head coach Jason Skoch said the Bulldogs had a lot of fight in them against SBU.

"Even though we won pretty handily, I thought our girls played great," Skoch said. "The game was better than the score relayed. Really more credit to SBU, but we played really good."

On Saturday the 'Dogs picked up right where they left off, completing a quick three game sweep (-27, -20, 33-31) of Columbia College. Truman hit .250 for the match led by Medina's 16 kills and 13 digs. The Bulldogs also were solid defensively, led by junior outside hitter Allie Cherven's seven blocks and Leshler's 18 digs. Truman also showed some perseverance by coming back from six points down in the final game, including three Columbia College game points, to complete the sweep.

Even with the victories, Skoch knows there still are a lot of things the team needs to work on.

"We didn't play good at all [against Columbia College]," Skoch said. "We came out flat and squandered a huge lead. In game three we were down a lot, and again give credit to the girls for fighting back."

The players know how much momentum can be gained by sweeping three consecutive opponents.

"It's very important [sweeping three straight opponents]," junior right side hitter Melissa Keck said. "... They were all definitely big wins for us. It helped build our confidence and all three of the teams played us extremely tough."

Leshler agreed with Keck about how big these wins can be.

"... It's really good to know how to just keep building momentum throughout the season and not letting down like we did earlier in the season," Leshler said. "There were teams we should have beaten and didn't."

Keck feels like the team has really started to click over the last couple of games.

"Everything was finally clicking and everything was starting to come together on the skill side," Keck said. "Our hitters and middles were starting to connect with the servers, ... and I feel like we are starting to get into the flow of the season."

The Bulldogs continue their string of games against ranked teams with a pair of MIAA games beginning on Saturday at No. 12 Pittsburgh State before coming home to take on No. 7 Washburn on Tuesday.

RANKED | Win against UCM improves 'Dogs' record to 5-1 against top-25 teams

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difference in players' statistics in competitive games and in games that the Bulldogs have an easier time with. He said players seem to hit better in games against better opponents.

"I'm trying to find ways to get them to understand mentally that they have to bring their game [all the time]," Skoch said. "... I don't coach differently, and I don't have different standards. Obviously there is something I need to do to help them because they aren't doing it on their own."

Skoch said he is trying several different things to try to change the mental aspect of the game.

"I've approached different angles,"

he said. "I'm big on goal-setting, but goal-setting is not as easy as people think. I'm having them do something where they evaluate themselves after each game about intensity and effort."

During this rough stretch of games, there also has been an increase in the intensity of practice.

"We work hard every day in practice," junior right side hitter Melissa Keck said. "We are not allowed to leave practice on a losing note, ... and we really have a fight in us this year that is definitely helping us achieve a higher level of play."

Sophomore outside hitter Susie Leshler said there is some difference in the attitude when the team plays ranked teams.

"Theoretically, there is no change [in

practice]," she said. "We can't control who is on the other side of the net."

Leshler said she wanted the team to improve its focus, particularly prior to Wednesday night's game against No. 5-ranked University of Central Missouri.

"Central's crowd is going to be really intense and a very tough environment to play in, and we need to stay in our own heads and focus and not let it affect us," Leshler said Monday, before the 'Dogs' victory against the Jennies.

Skoch said one reason the Jennies are a very strong team is because they have a lot of seniors who have played together for a long time and know the game well. He also said a scrappy game against Central would favor the 'Dogs.

COLUMN | Offense, defense and special teams all need to improve for football

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In the non-conference portion of the schedule, the Bulldogs scored 93 points. Where did that offense go? I know Northwest and the University of Central Missouri are far superior to the University of Missouri-Rolla and Upper Iowa. Still, where did the offense go?

Ticich didn't suddenly go from a record-setting quarterback to a mediocre one in two games. He still is one of the best quarterbacks in the MIAA — maybe even all of Div. II.

His corps of receivers, while young, still is explosive.

And let's not forget the running backs. Senior Jake Cunningham has been the invisible man in the running game this fall after being an All-MIAA selection last season. Why is

he not being used more often?

Frankly, the defense just needs to get better. Northwest running back Xavier Omon is no slouch, but five touchdowns is a little much. The defense hasn't shown they can stop the run all season.

And it's not like they are doing any better stopping the pass. In the team's two losses, the opposition has gained 428 yards through the air.

It doesn't help that junior corner Derek Rodriguez hurt his knee in week two, forcing the Bulldogs to play freshman Luther Eta. No knock on the highly-recruited Eta, but true freshmen should spend the season on the bench, not on the field. The freshman had nine tackles in the loss to Northwest. Corners should not have nine tack-

les in a game.

Tie in the special teams' miscues from the last two weeks — a 27-yard punt against UCM and a punt that was returned for a score against Northwest — and it's easy to see why I think this team is in trouble.

That is not to say the season is over after just four games. There are still seven games left on the schedule. There is still plenty of time to right the ship.

This team is far too talented to go 2-9 again.

If the Bulldogs want to prove me wrong and really show that they are one of the top teams in the MIAA and all of Div. II, they have to get better in all aspects of the game. Or else they are destined for another season hovering around the .500 mark.

FOOTBALL | Northwest wins Ol' Hickory Stick for 6th straight year

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who led the Bulldogs' defense with 13 total tackles.

Starting field position was a key factor in Northwest's success. Of the Bearcats' six offensive touchdowns, five came on scoring drives of fewer than 60 yards, with three of the drives starting in Truman territory.

Northwest's average starting field position was its own 39-yard line while the Bulldogs' average starting spot was their own 27-yard line.

Much of the difference in field position could be attributed to special teams play. Northwest averaged more than 17 yards per punt return, including Kendall Wright's 47-yard punt return for the opening touchdown, and outgained the Bulldogs by more than 10 yards per kickoff return.

"The field position throughout the day was pathetic," Currier said. "And there are a lot of factors in that. One is special teams, two is the inability for the offense to move, and three is not being able to stop them."

The Bulldogs' only score of the game came on a 78-yard drive in the first quarter. Truman attained five of its 11 first downs on this drive, and junior

quarterback Matt Ticich eventually penetrated the end zone with a 1-yard keeper. The score cut the Bearcats' lead to 14-6, but the Bulldogs gained just 90 more yards after this juncture in the game.

"[Northwest] was pretty effective in shutting down the run, which made us rely on the pass," Ticich said. "When you become one-dimensional, it's difficult to beat a team like that."

Despite completing more than 60 percent of his passes, Ticich was limited to just 118 passing yards. Senior running back Jake Cunningham, who rushed the ball just four times for one yard in the game, led the Bulldogs with 11 catches for 58 yards.

Currier said he hopes his team uses the beating it received from Northwest as a motivational tool in its conference home opener. Truman will continue to search for its first MIAA win when it hosts Fort Hays State University (3-1) at 6:30 p.m. Saturday at Stokes Stadium.

"It's one of those turning point games," Ticich said. "We could either turn it around, or if we don't, 0-3 [in conference play], that's going to be tough to come back from. Look at it as the biggest game of the season for us."



Jackson Groves/Index
 Junior wide receiver Tyler Fenton collects a pass for a touchdown in the Bulldogs' 55-31 Sept. 8 victory against Upper Iowa. The team fell to Northwest Missouri State 53-6 Saturday.



Jason Williams/Index
 Senior Jennifer Salmon attempts a backhand earlier this fall. Salmon reached the Round of 16 in last weekend's ITA regional championships.

TENNIS | Several women advance to latter rounds of the fall's premier event

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Blair said. "I just kind of decided I was going to have fun and go for my shots and see what happened, and it ended up paying off."

Blair ended her second brush with an eventual tournament champion, falling to Northwest's No. 2 Kristina Vucenov, a Div. I transfer, in straight-sets.

Blair partnered with classmate Courtney Walther to make up the No. 4 doubles pair. The duo handled Nebraska-Kearney's Clair Bryan and Marcella Strydom 8-5 in the first-round, accompanying its 8-3 victory against Metropolitan State University's (Minn.) Alecia Jenkins and Miriam Evangelista in the next round.

"We are obviously pretty comfortable playing with each other," Blair said. "We feel pretty confident in our doubles. She [Walther] was finishing volleys and just going for her shots."

The pair dropped its quarter-final encounter with No. 7 duo Jollie Cook and Chelsey Janzen of Southwest Baptist University.

"We just came off tentatively, kind of hoping they would miss," Blair said. "That's one thing that coach this week has been working with us in practice is just poaching more and being aggressive rather than playing not to lose."

Walther fared well in singles play, defeating Northwest's Lina Gomez 7-6, 6-4, before losing to Missouri Southern's Michelle Hall 6-1, 6-0.

"Courtney had a draw that was unfortunate," Kendall said. "Had she been in a little better place, ... she certainly could have made the quarters as well."

Senior No. 8 Jennifer Salmon notched two Round-of-16 appearances as the Bulldogs fought for regional contention. She dropped a mere four games in her first two matches.

Facing Krystal Smith of Mesa State College (Col.) in first-round action, Salmon won 6-2, 6-1.

"I was happy with that match and just playing well under the elements and the circumstances," Salmon said. "It's always good to start out with a good win."

Salmon handled Northwest's Jordan Lipira 6-0, 6-1 to advance to the last 16. Taking on Southwest Baptist's No. 13 Iveta Wolfgramm, Salmon fought hard down to a three-set extension, but lost 6-2, 5-7, 10-2. The match began Friday and finished Saturday because of weather conditions.

After an 8-3 first-round win against Metro's Alexis Alvarez and April Hired, Salmon and freshman doubles partner Amy Ochs fell to No. 2 eventual champions Bayon and Natalie Villafior 8-3.

"That was only the second time ... that we played together," Salmon said. "I was really happy with how we played together. I am really excited about doubles in the spring."

Ochs took on Lisa Pendrack in a singles play-in round match, falling 6-3, 6-1. Classmate Kelsey Kuykendall fell 6-3, 6-4 to Missouri Southern's Katie Anderson. The pair did finish atop their consolation flights, with classmate Kirstyn Sampias reaching her flight final.

"I have been really impressed with our freshmen," Blair said. "I think we are pretty confident in our lower spots. That's really what the fall season is about ... trying to give people confidence to take with them into the spring season."

The Bulldogs are back in action this coming Tuesday, taking on William Jewel College (Kan.) in Liberty, Mo. In their last match-up of the season, the women travel to Macomb, Ill., next weekend for the Western Illinois Invitational.

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