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SPORTS

Football 16
Bulldogs try to build upon 2006 winning season.

Sunday, August 19, 2007

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Medina leads young team

Junior outside hitter steps into new role as leader for fall season

BY JOE BARKER
Sports Editor

Experience matters. In life and in sports, having experience is crucial. Having it can mean the difference between getting a promotion at work and knowing what it takes to win 36 games in a row because you have done it before.

The 2007 incarnation of the Bulldogs is made up of 11 players who have yet to play a full season's worth of games. The team needs some experience.

Enter Eli Medina. The junior outside hitter has yet to miss a match in her two years as a Bulldog and is the most match-experienced member of the purple and white. By default she is now a leader and so far this summer, Medina has had no problem adapting to the role.

"Right now she's our best player out there," head coach Jason Skoch said. "It's good because when we are going through these drills she's real coachable. And the girls can watch her and see what I'm trying to get at and what I expect from an outside hitter."

Senior setter Amanda Holliday said she has noticed a change in the leadership style in her teammate of two years this summer.

"She's stepped up a lot," Holliday said. "She's very much a leader. I think she's surprised people with how much of a vocal leader she is. In the past she has more led by example and done things right — done things the way they are supposed to be done. Now she's

very talkative." Medina said she thinks there is no reason for her change. She is just trying to be the best Bulldog she can and help out the younger players.

"There's always pressure, even as an underclassman," Medina said. "But now I just want to be sure I'm setting a good example for the younger kids just to work hard and show them what Truman volleyball is all about."

Many wondered if the volleyball team's run of dominance would end when Sarah Shearman,

"She's stepped up a lot. She's very much a leader. I think she's surprised people with how much of a vocal leader she is. In the past she has more led by example and done things right — done things the way they are supposed to be done."

Amanda Holliday
Senior Setter

Kelsey Wackerman, Christine Wagener and Alex Baker finished their playing careers last fall. They took with them more than 500 matches of experience and 136 wins. Skoch said having someone with a strong connection to a winning tradition should help keep the run going.

"It helps a lot as far as the transition goes," Skoch said.

Medina is entering her third year in the starting lineup. After her first two years, she has played in 76 matches a row, a streak that should remain intact this season.

Medina spent her first two years as the youngest on a team filled with veterans. In her first year, she was the lone freshman starter because of her ability to not make mistakes and solid defense.

This season, Medina's performance will have more of an impact on how the team finishes. Apart from being a leader, Medina will be expected to pack more of an offensive punch. In her two-year career, she has averaged an even 2 kills per game, a number Skoch said should go up.

Skoch said Medina needs to step up offensively so the opposition

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Junior outside hitter Eli Medina delivers an attack during a game last fall while junior middle blocker Allie Cherven looks on. With the loss of four players from last year's squad, the Bulldogs will rely on Medina and Cherven for a return trip to the national tournament.

Volleyball seeks first title

Squad trying to overcome loss of four seniors from last year's 36-2 national tournament team

BY JOE BARKER
Sports Editor

Replacing one All-American would be tough for any volleyball team.

The Bulldogs have to replace two.

All-Americans Sarah Shearman and Kelsey Wackerman have graduated. So have Alex Baker and All-MIAA honorable mention Christine Wagener. The Bulldogs will start 2007 with half of the starting lineup different from last season's 36-2 national tournament qualifier.

With all the losses, head coach Jason Skoch said his team is going to have to play more as a unit if they want to repeat last year's regular season success.

"You always win by teamwork, but this year we're going to really have to just push it,"

Skoch said. "We're not going to be able to rely on just one person to win it for us."

Despite the losses, the MIAA coaches still think the 'Dogs are a team to fear.

In the annual preseason poll, the defending conference champions were tabbed as the second best team. Washburn University, with its six returning starters, was picked first.

"To me it's actually not a bad vote from the other coaches," Skoch said. "I think it says they have a lot of respect for us because we did lose a lot."

The slight in the poll didn't seem to bother junior outside hitter Eli Medina.

"I don't lose too much sleep over rankings," Medina said. "It just matters how the end of the game turns out."

The six-member junior class, led by middle blocker Allie Cherven, is one of the reasons why rival MIAA coaches still fear the Bulldogs. In her first season as a Bulldog after transferring from Div. I Pittsburgh University, Cherven shined. She was an AVCA All-American

honorable mention and first-team All-MIAA.

Skoch said one of the main goals for the early season's tournaments is to find an offensive complement to Cherven. Redshirt freshman Kristen Nissen and 6-foot-3 true freshman Courtney Larson are the early favorites to ease Cherven's offensive load.

"We may struggle at the first tournament or two, but when [Larson] clicks with the rest of the team, her and Kristen Nissen will bring enough power to where we can rely on them to bring us some points," Skoch said.

Junior right-side hitter Melissa Keck will be looked at to have a big year. She was named to the AVCA All-Region team, and Skoch said he thinks she could make the leap to All-American this season.

Medina and libero Whitney Boehler should return to the starting lineup and play key roles in 2007. A healthy Boehler should provide a lift for the team. The defensive specialist battled through multiple injuries in

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Men's soccer eyes breakout season

Team looks to continue run of 14 straight years with a winning record

BY BRENT FOSTER
Staff Reporter

If more experience means more success, then the men's soccer team should be in good shape heading into the 2007 season.

Coming off a season in which the Bulldogs went 8-7-3 and had 13 freshmen on their roster, head coach Duke Cochran knows experience gained in games last season will be huge for this year's team.

"We were a really young team last year and had 16 new players on our roster," Cochran said. "We lost a lot of games by one goal last year. The biggest thing for us this year will be can we win those close games in the 80th minute and it's zero to zero. I think we can do that."

Junior midfielder Josh Weir also has confidence in this year's team.

"I think experience will be the biggest key to winning those close games," Weir said. "We had a lot of freshmen last year and most of them saw some playing time. Now they have a year under their belt, so we now know what it takes."

Six of the Bulldogs' seven losses last season came by one

goal. Additionally, leading goal scorer junior Matt Taylor said he will not play soccer this year and focus strictly on basketball.

Heading into this season the Bulldogs know that their defense and work ethic will be huge factors in improving the team's record in one-goal games.

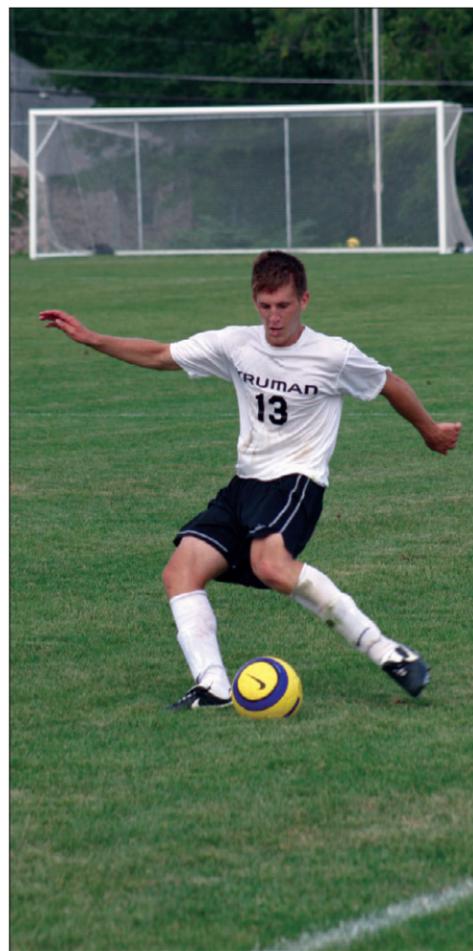
"We were 21st in the nation last year in goals against," Weir said. "There is no reason why we can't be in the top ten or top five in the nation defensively this year. During practice we have been working really hard. It will be hard to

find a team that out-works us this year. Our offense will be better, which should take some pressure off of our defense by scoring more goals, which will make it even better. We are still a young team with a lot of sophomores and freshmen, but we have that year of experience which will probably be the biggest key to our success."

The players and coaches also know that camaraderie is a big key to the team's success.

"We are a very close team, and we all like each other," junior midfielder Nick Zarkadis said. "We work really hard together on the field. This will really be a help to our team in tough games. We really commit to each other and make sure the person next to us and in

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Sophomore back Jack Randazzo passes to an open teammate during a game last season. The soccer team went 8-7-3 last year.

University athletics are worth students' interest

I remember my freshman year move-in day. Between trying to talk to my mother without her bursting into tears and attempting to move my entire life into a tiny dorm room in 100-degree heat, the last thing on my mind was the state of Truman athletics.

But eventually — probably when I was sitting in my room not doing one of the exciting things on my itinerary — I began to wonder about the sports teams here and picked up a copy of the Index.

Since some of you may be doing the exact thing now that I was doing three years ago, I figured I might act as a de facto tour guide through Truman athletics.

The first thing I wondered was how good the teams were. I went to tiny Pacific High School about 40 minutes west of St. Louis. We were, to put it bluntly, not very good when it came to athletics. In fact, the football team won a total of five games in my four years as a student. We were the homecoming opponent for just about every school in the conference.

I would have to say that most of the Bulldog teams are above average, which is pretty good considering Truman is the home of 21 varsity-level sports — the most of any school in Missouri. If you haven't heard this before, get used to it. You will hear it again. For some reason the athletic department likes to brag

about how it has more teams than anyone else. To me this seems like me bragging that I own the most pair of black socks. Sure a lot of them have holes, but I still have a lot.

Fortunately, a lot of the Bulldog teams are in better condition than my socks.

Volleyball, men's soccer, women's soccer, women's swimming, men's swimming, men's basketball, wrestling and track have been strong teams since I have been here.

The women's swim team just ended a streak of six straight national championships last fall with its second-place showing at nationals. Still, in the last eight years the worst you can say about them is that they were the second-best Div. II swim team in the nation — a pretty good thing to say if you ask me.

Football, golf and tennis look to be on the way up and should be a lot of fun to watch this year. Baseball, women's basketball and softball haven't been that successful since I have been here, but they too seem to be improving.

All in all, the majority of the teams here play at a higher level than most of their opponents and have some top-notch athletes you wouldn't expect at a small liberal arts school in Northeast Missouri. At the very least, all of the teams should be competitive and fun to watch.

Speaking of fun to watch, I encourage you to attend at least one home game of a sport of your choosing this year. The athletic department will point out that admission for games is free, which is partially true.

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