



File Photo
Sophomore John Rothfus extends for a serve during a match last spring. The men were 14-9 and qualified for nationals in 2006.

Tennis returns key players

BY KYLE MAGEE
Staff Reporter

As the beginning of another semester quickly approaches, the familiarity of routine brings out the best in people. For the Bulldog tennis teams, this season serves as a grand opportunity to make themselves heard.

Head coach Pete Kendall moves into his 15th year at the University as optimistic as ever.

"Both teams are going to be very deep," Kendall said. "That's one thing I strive for."

Kendall's men, returning seven of the eight players responsible for last season's NCAA Tournament bid, look to continue their success.

Although the schedule fashions seven tournaments for the Bulldogs, they look to use this fall as preparation for more competitive spring encounters with rival MIAA schools.

"There are five teams in the men's conference that made the national tournament last year," Kendall said. "I would expect that to happen again. Within the conference, it is very tough on both sides."

A key to the team's success this fall depends on filling the shoes of veteran leader and three-time letter winner Ryan Cope, who graduated.

Sophomore Peter Bracha said he feels confident and believes individual spirit serves as an effective means for success this season.

"Ryan was definitely a very good player and leader," Bracha said. "We're going to miss him a lot. Tennis is a very individualized sport. Everybody on the team has great motivation during practice and matches. I don't think there will be any need for any kind of leadership. All the players take care of themselves."

While enjoying an NCAA tournament bid in six of the past 10 seasons, the team failed to progress past the opening round in each appearance, losing 5-2 to St. Cloud (Minn.) to end last season.

"I'm fairly optimistic about this season," Bracha said. "Honestly, I'd be pretty disappointed if we didn't qualify for the national tournament."

Enjoying a fourth place, 13-8 finish in the MIAA last season, Kendall announced the off-season addition of freshman Colin Boswell. Boswell, a Pella, Iowa standout, finished second and third in the Class 1 Iowa State High School Boys Tennis Tournament the past two years.

Boswell rounds out the team as the eighth member, joining Bracha

alongside the likes of senior Cody Pusateri and sophomores Ben Rusk and John Rothfus.

"[Boswell's] a very good player," Bracha said. "[He has a lot] of potential. If he keeps on working hard, then he's going to keep on improving and will definitely have an impact on the line-up and the season."

While the men begin their season at the Western Illinois Invitational Sept. 7 in Macomb, Ill., the women's squad gets their chance to impress at home during the Truman Invitational beginning the same day.

In addition to returning veteran senior Jennifer Salmon and junior Lindsay Blair, Kendall added four promising women to the line-up to strengthen the team, which suffered a 5-0 first-round tournament defeat at the hands of Northwest Missouri.

"I am really excited for the upcoming season," junior Courtney Walther said. "I know everyone on the team has been playing a lot this summer. Specifically, I have been working on my serve and my volley to help with my doubles game."

Kendall's recruits include Kelsey Kuykendall of Orongo, Mo., Chatman, Ill., native Kirstyn Sampias, Anna Greenwald from Ames, Iowa, and Kirksville local Amy Ochs.

"With these four recruits, we

think the women's team is going to have a really good year," Kendall said. "It's always hard to say what's going to happen. The conference is very strong on both sides. We want to have a winning season, win the conference and make the tournament."

"They are all really solid players and have tournament experience and are all really excited about coming," Walther said. "I think they will be great assets to our team. We should have a really good shot at making the postseason."

After increasing the squad to 10 players, Walther said she thinks Salmon's ability to lead the team provides the backbone to success.

"She has been the number one player the past two years," Walther said. "She has a lot of experience and is really good at helping us get motivated. I think Lindsay [Blair] and I too can bring some experience and help the new girls feel more confident about playing."

Last spring was the first time in four years the women made the national tournament. The women have three consecutive home tournaments leading up to late September's Intercollegiate Tennis Association Regional Tournament in Maryville, Mo.

Fall athletic season offers a slew of good games

The slates have been wiped clean. Every University sport is currently undefeated. All can dream of winning a national title.

Each year, fall signifies a new beginning for Truman athletics. And with four major sports — football, volleyball and men's and women's soccer — building off winning seasons in 2006, fall promises to be the most exciting season yet for Bulldog sports.

Below, I have highlighted my ten most compelling matchups of the fall.

10. Football vs. Missouri Western, Nov. 10: Only time will tell the true importance of this game. As the last regular season game, it could simply mark the end of the season for one or both of these teams.

But, the Griffons and Bulldogs are projected to finish somewhere in the top half of the MIAA, and this game could affect the postseason destinies of these squads.

9. Men's Soccer vs. Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, Oct. 12:

Year in, year out, the Cougars are one of the toughest teams on the Bulldog schedule. This season will be no exception. Edwardsville is ranked seventh in the NCAA Div. II preseason poll.

If the Bulldogs can stage an upset against Edwardsville, it will help them in their quest to return to the NCAA tournament after not receiving a bid last season.

8. Women's Soccer vs. University of Nebraska-Omaha, Sept. 8: The 'Dogs' home opener comes against their biggest non-conference rival and an NCAA quarterfinalist last season.

A Bulldog victory seems unlikely in this one, but if they could achieve the unthinkable and defeat the Mavericks, it would give them added confidence moving into MIAA play.

7. Volleyball vs. Central Missouri, Oct. 31: Central suffered only two conference losses last season, both to Truman. The Jennies are expected to be the 'Dogs' biggest challenger for the top spot in the MIAA East Division again this season.

This matchup is Truman's last against an opponent from the east division and could determine whether the Bulldogs earn a No. 1 seed in the MIAA tournament.

6. Men's Soccer at Rockhurst (Mo.), Aug. 29: Simply put, these teams hate each other. In last season's opener, they combined for 10 yellow cards and one red card as they battled to a 1-1 tie. Both teams should be above average again in 2007, giving this game plenty of appeal.

5. Football at Northwest Missouri State, Sept. 22: The Hickory Stick game may have lost some of its pizzazz due to Northwest's dominance in recent years. Truman has dropped 10 of their last 11 games against their in-state foes, including a 31-10 defeat last season.

Still, this is one of the longest standing rivalries in Div. II athletics. And after a 6-5 record last season, the Bulldogs could truly put themselves on the MIAA radar with a strong showing against the 2006 national runner-up.

4. Women's Soccer vs. Washburn, Sept. 21: When Washburn won the conference last season, it was the first time

ever a school not named Truman sat atop the MIAA. The Lady Blues were picked to repeat as conference champs in pre-season polls. Consequently, this contest will be pivotal for the 'Dogs if they hope to reclaim the MIAA crown.

3. Volleyball vs. North Alabama in the Findlay (Ohio) Tournament, Aug. 31: Last November, UNA accomplished a seemingly impossible task. Down 2-0 to the Bulldogs, they staged an improbable comeback in Pershing Arena, claiming the next three games.

The defeat snapped a string of 36 straight Bulldog victories and, more importantly, bounced the No. 1 seed out of the NCAA tournament in the second round while the Lions went on to reach the national championship.

This early season matchup will give the Bulldogs the chance to make amends for last season's heartbreak.

2. Football vs. Upper Iowa University, Sept. 8: The important aspect of this game might not be whom the Bulldogs are playing but at what time (6:30 p.m.) the game kicks off. That means football under the lights, just like you remember it in high school.

In addition to being the first night game played at Stokes Stadium in almost a dozen years, it's the Bulldogs' home opener and a must-win game against a team that won just three games last season.

1. Volleyball vs. Washburn, Oct. 2: The volleyball squad finished MIAA play unscathed in 2006, going a perfect 13-0. They strung together 36 consecutive victories between the two losses that were bookends to the season. Of those 36 victories, the Bulldogs won 27 of them via a 3-0 sweep of their opponent. At one point, the 'Dogs won 10 consecutive matches without even losing a game.

And after all that, Truman did not claim the top spot in MIAA preseason rankings. That honor went to Washburn despite the fact that the Bulldogs are ranked nine spots ahead of the Lady Blues in the AVCA Div. II preseason national poll. In this home matchup, the 'Dogs have the opportunity to prove they are still the team to beat in the MIAA.

And there you have it, the Toppmeyer Top Ten. It should prove a bona fide list of quality games to keep your eye on this fall.



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