

'Dogs roll in first tourney

Volleyball team goes 3-1 at Ramada Inn Classic, beat No. 2 Minn.-Duluth

BY BEN YARNELL
Staff Reporter

The start of the volleyball season last weekend was business as usual for the Bulldogs.

The 'Dogs went 3-1 this weekend in their first test of the season at the Ramada Inn Classic in St. Paul, Minn.

The team started off the weekend with a match Friday against Northern Michigan University. In the first game, the Bulldogs jumped out to an early 6-0 lead, but the Wildcats rallied for 16 points. In the end, key points from junior right-side hitter Melissa Keck, junior libero Whitney Boehler and junior outside hitter Eli Medina locked up game one for the 'Dogs. Game 2 was a tighter match, with Northern Michigan coming out on top. The Bulldogs bounced back to take games three and four for the first win of the season.

Head coach Jason Skoch said the win was mostly because of Northern Michigan's play.

"We didn't play that great," Skoch said. "They've had three coaches in four years, and they've had a lot of new personnel, so they haven't found their groove yet."

The second match of the day was against Concordia University (Minn.), a team the 'Dogs had some history with. Last season, the Golden Bears delivered the first of only two losses for Truman. History ended up repeating itself as Concordia downed the Bulldogs in three games.

Freshman right-side hitter Allison Barker pointed to a lack of focus as the main downfall against Concordia.

"I don't think enough changed between the matches," Barker said. "We just did not step up our game enough for Concordia."

As the Bulldogs started their second day of play, they had a renewed sense of purpose as they went into the match against Millersville University (Penn.) That purpose came through as the 'Dogs defeated the Marauders in three straight games. The match also marked career kill records for Barker with 14 and sophomore right side hitter Erin Hatte with 7.

For Barker, setting records was

not the focus for the match.

"I didn't even know about it," Barker said. "I guess I was happy. I'm not really a stats person. I was just glad that the team won."

Heading into the final match of the tournament, the No. 7-ranked Bulldogs were the underdogs against the No. 2 University of Minnesota-Duluth. The teams traded off game wins, driving the match into five games. The 'Dogs sealed the match up, however, with a 9-1 win in game five.

For freshman right-side hitter Kristen Nissen, the way the team beat Duluth was simple.

"We just wore them down in the end and had the heart to win," Nissen said.

Skoch said he was pleased with the upset win.

"It was the only really good game we played," Skoch said. "I think it helps that our practices are tougher. We have pressure situations. Honestly, they are the better team, but we had more fight than they did."

One key player for the team throughout the weekend was Keck. She was first or second in kills in all three matches she played, including a career-high 20 kills against Northern Michigan.

Skoch noted, however, that the team cannot simply ride the talents of Keck.

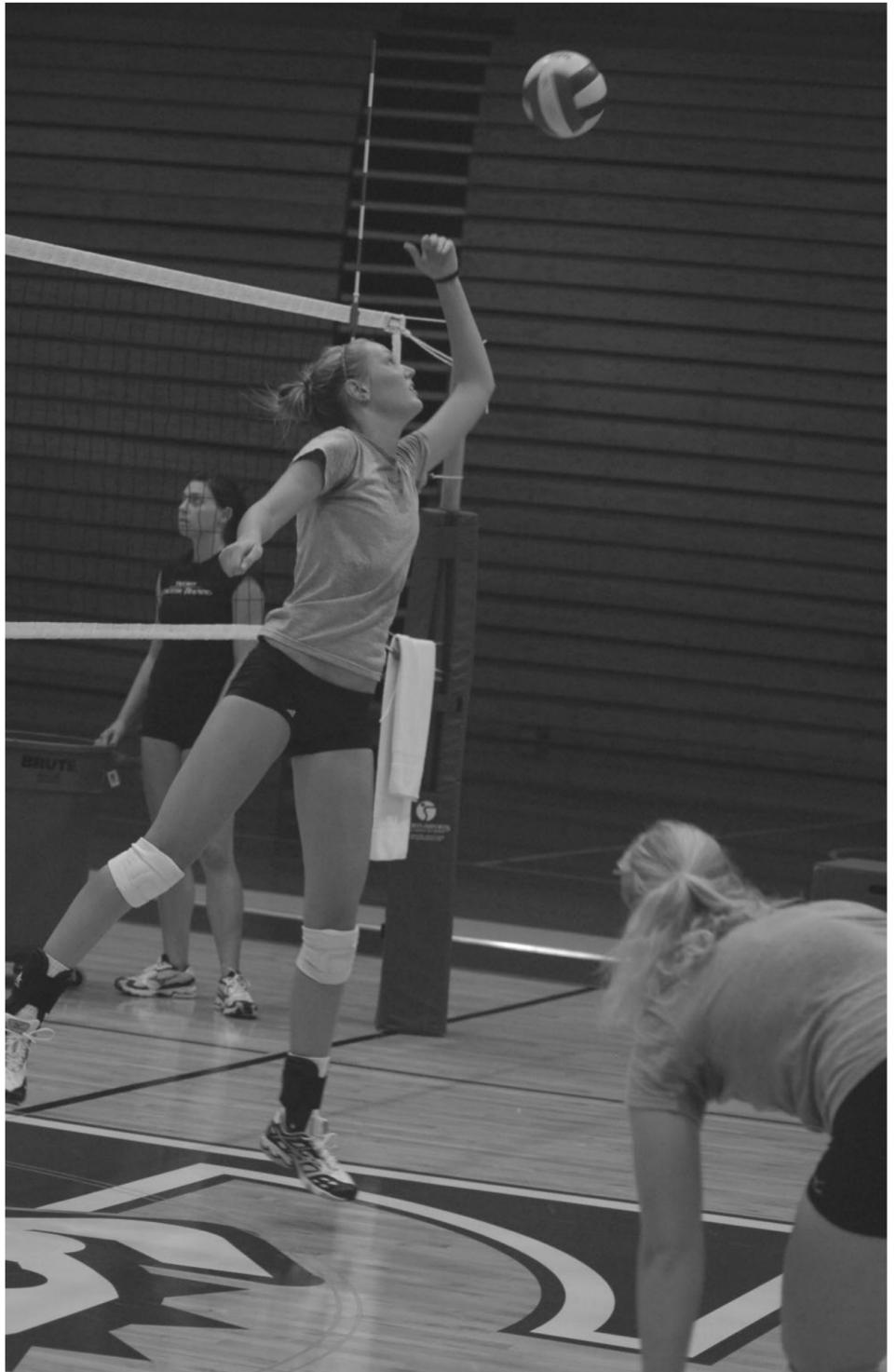
"We couldn't have won without those numbers," Skoch said. "It was nice that she could do that, but we will be better by the time we play next weekend."

Next weekend, the Bulldogs will travel to Findlay, Ohio to compete in the Towneplace Suites Classic. The 'Dogs again will have some history with their opponents when they take on the University of North Alabama. The Lions were the only other team to beat Truman last season, when they knocked them out of the NCAA regional tournament in the semifinals.

Other than the University of Central Oklahoma, whom the 'Dogs beat in three games last season, the rest of the teams are new to the schedule.

Skoch said he has a plan for practice this week that he hopes will translate into success this weekend.

"We are going to be focusing a lot on our outside hitting," Skoch said. "Until we become more fundamentally sound, we are going to have to push [our hitters], because other teams' outside hitters are better than ours. Offensively, we have got to have more power."



Chris Waller/Index
Freshman Courtney Larson participates in a drill during Monday's practice. Larson and the Bulldogs went 3-1 at the season-opening Ramada Inn Classic in St. Paul, Minn. One of the wins came against No. 2 Minnesota-Duluth.

Senior setter crucial for team

BY BEN YARNELL
Staff Reporter

For every great spike, there is always someone there to set it up.

That is why one of the keys to a successful season this year for the Truman women's volleyball team is going to be solid play from its crop of setters.

The Bulldogs know how important a setter is for the team. Last year, the team looked to the skills of All-American setter Kelsey Wackerman and Christine Wagener, who received All-MIAA honorable mention.

Head coach Jason Skoch said to reach such a level in the MIAA, it takes a well-rounded player in all aspects of the game.

"The tough thing is, our conference is so tough," Skoch said. "We had four ranked teams last year, two in the top 10. We're getting the University of Nebraska-Omaha next year. You've got to be above average at any position because this isn't a chump conference."

Looking to fill those shoes this year is senior setter Amanda Holliday. This will be the first year starting for Holliday, who has had to play behind not only Wackerman and Wagener, but also older players such as Rebecca Kniefelkamp, who was a leader for the

team in assists in 2004.

In order to prime herself for the season, Holliday said she has been preparing in several different ways.

"We've been working out all this spring and summer in the weight room to get ready," Holliday said. "Coach has also been working a lot on my hands, with positioning, to help me get better."

So far this season, Holliday has been working to keep up the tradition of solid Bulldog setters. Last weekend, at the Ramada Inn Classic in St. Paul, Minn., Holliday was one of the top setters for the team, compiling 80 assists. Working to become the rounded player she needs to be, she led the setters with 36 digs, making her both an offensive and defensive threat.

Skoch said one of the biggest reasons Holliday was putting up the numbers she has is partly because of the fact that she is the team's sole senior.

"When you are a senior, all of a sudden, you realize, 'This is my last chance,'" Skoch said. "All of a sudden, the little stuff doesn't matter anymore."

One of the many players who has benefited from the experience that has come from Holliday's leadership has been freshman right-side hitter Allison Barker.

"Amanda always gives me the best

advice," Barker said. "If she tells me to do something, I'll go and change it, and it will work. She is great to have around."

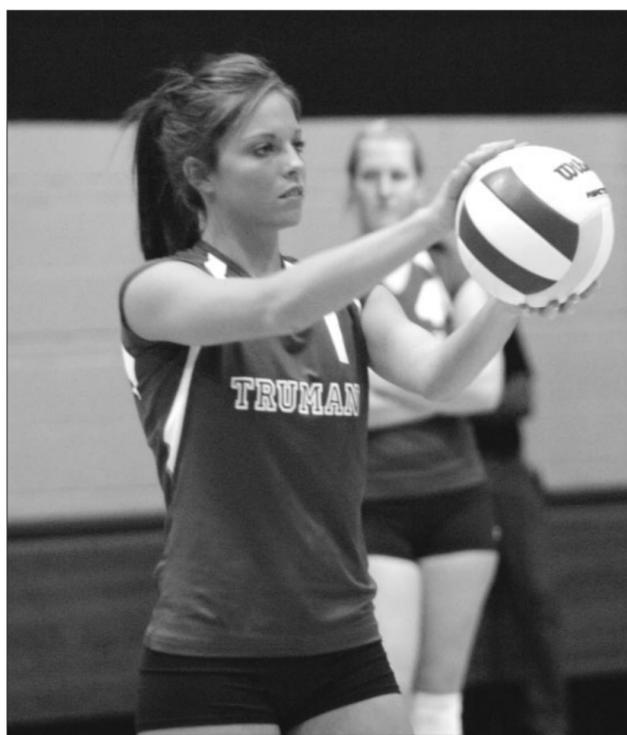
It is that sort of leadership that Holliday hopes to exhibit for the team this year, especially at the position of setter.

"[As setters,] we are expected to make good sets, expected to move the ball around," Holliday said. "We have an important job. If we slack off and we lose focus, it can really hurt our team. I think that is why we work so hard at practice."

Working hard right alongside Holliday is freshman setter Ashley Petak, who currently is the first backup for Holliday in pressure situations. Petak led the team last weekend in assists, with 85. Skoch said he does not look at the two as No. 1 and No. 2 but rather as one-and-a-half each.

"The one thing Amanda has is that she is a senior, so she is a little bit tougher than Ashley," Skoch said. "Ashley is somewhat of a better technical setter, but her defense isn't as good so they sort of even out."

Skoch has said that this week the team will need to put a big emphasis on the outside hitting game to be ready for next week's tournament, which makes the setters a key to winning.



File Photo
Senior setter Amanda Holliday prepares to serve during a match last season. Holliday is in her first season as a starter for the volleyball team.

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