



Redshirt freshman Donald Harvey looks for running room during a game last fall. Harvey was the Bulldogs' third leading rusher last season, and he's in the mix of candidates who are campaigning during spring practice for playing time in 2009.

RBs vie for playing time

'Dogs work in spring practice to improve ground attack

BY ARRON HUSTEAD
Staff Reporter

A large number of returning contributors on offense could lead to good results for the football team's run game next fall.

The team averaged 120 rushing yards per game last season, and senior quarterback Matt Tichich led the team in rushing from 2006-08. Truman ranked ninth in the MIAA in rushing in 2008.

Interim head coach Aaron Vlcko said the team needs a more effective running game in 2009 to be successful.

"The competition [at running back] is as strong as it's ever been in my time here," he said. "We've got a lot of hungry young players that want opportunities to carry the football and are doing the unselfish things as well."

Vlcko said the offense runs a lot of plays that allow the quarterback to utilize his legs to spread the field. But if the quarterback leads the team in rushing again this year, Vlcko said the Bulldogs probably will be a middle-of-the-pack team in the conference again in 2009.

The Bulldogs haven't had

an individual rush for more than 700 yards since Jerard Levenson had a 1,012-yard season in 2003.

Sophomore Anton Bernard was the team's second leading rusher last season and led the team in rushing average with four yards per carry. Vlcko said Bernard basically was the team's feature back the last part of the 2008 season. Bernard comes into spring season at more than 200 pounds for the first time in his career. Vlcko said the extra weight should prove beneficial with Bernard's running style.

"Bernard has shown his ability to play hard, be an unselfish player, and we're excited that he's put some weight on finally," Vlcko said. "We've always thought he runs [like a power back], but he was 185 pounds."

The team's third leading rusher, freshman Donald Harvey, also will be returning. Vlcko said seniors Phil Kenney and Vanness Emokpae will both play a role in the running game as well, out of the slot receiver position. Emokpae moved from an outside wide receiver to an inside slot receiver last summer, but he was unable to get much playing time last season because of a knee injury he suffered in the first game of the year.

"He's a guy that we think we

can do a lot of things with, both in the passing game and in the running game," Vlcko said.

Kenney was second on the team in rushing touchdowns last season with three, and he averaged three yards per carry on 32 attempts. Kenney said the Bulldogs will look to build on the success they had in the running game late last season. He said having a variety of returning starters on the offensive side of the ball will be an important advantage for them.

Kenney said the team will be utilizing more option rushing plays to try to keep opposing defenses off guard. Kenney said he and several other Bulldogs can contribute quite a bit to the running game this season.

"I think we're just trying to get as many options out there as we can," Kenney said. "We've got lots of guys, and we'll have a lot of competition throughout the spring and camps to see who's going to get a lot of those carries."

Vlcko said a big boost to the running game this season will come from the offensive line, where the team returns four of five starters from last season. Vlcko said the unit will give the team an advantage in stability without much personnel turnover. The unit also will have

coaching stability as offensive line coach Marty Costello returns for his third season.

"There are lots of different ways to teach [the offensive line]," Vlcko said. "A stable coach there to work with kids year in and year out is really going to be the thing that helps our run game the most."

Vlcko said the O-line has some depth along with its returning starters, making the competition for playing time on the offensive line the best it has ever been.

Junior offensive lineman Jon Gialds played in eight games last season, and he said he hopes to see playing time at left guard this season. Gialds said that from his perspective, it will take the linemen being more physical up front to improve the rushing game this season.

"We're not shying away from getting down and dirty," Gialds said. "One of our team goals at this point is to play with a hard-edge and give it that much more effort."

Gialds said he thinks the team is further along in the running game this spring than they have been in a while. He said the experience of the returning players being accustomed to playing together will be a major boost for them in the fall.

TRUMAN ATHLETICS News and Notes

Men's tennis: Hipkiss battles calf injury

Tennis head coach Pete Kendall said junior Steve Hipkiss still is nursing a calf injury after sitting out the singles portion of the March 27 match against Emporia State University.

"It's just kind of slow," Kendall said. "He's able to play, but it's just kind of bugging him. He's had ... three days off now, so hopefully it's gotten a little better."

Since sitting out, Hipkiss has a 0-2 record in singles and a 3-1 record in doubles. However, the 'Dogs have played two ranked opponents in that span in Washburn University and Grand Valley State University.

Another player, junior John Rothfusz, is continuing his match-by-match injury status. Rothfusz said he has a torn labrum in his right shoulder that he injured while serving. Rothfusz has played seven doubles matches and four singles matches this spring.

Rothfusz said the shoulder is sometimes aggravated when he serves, which is why he has primarily been playing doubles. If the injury is aggravated, he said he essentially cannot make any type of shot.

"[The shoulder injury] hasn't really affected me yet, but at the same time, I haven't been playing a lot of singles," Rothfusz said. "I guess we're just trying to keep it healthy."

Athletics: Limsiaco, Kelly win MIAA honors

Junior golfer Krystal Limsiaco and senior runner Danna Kelly were named MIAA athletes of the week in their respective sports.

Limsiaco won the Bulldog Classic by eight strokes last weekend at Kirksville Country Club with a two-day score of 166. The victory last weekend was Limsiaco's second first-place finish in the 2008-09 season. The Bulldogs won the four-team tournament and sophomore Jen Lawson placed second.

Kelly placed first in the 3,000-meter steeplechase with a time of 10:58.78. It was the second-straight week Kelly broke her own school record in the event. She has a provisional mark in the event and is close to the NCAA automatic qualifying mark of 10:55.00. For more on Kelly, see story on page 20 of the Index.

Baseball: Team experiences defensive slip

The baseball team has been defensively solid for most of the season. But the Bulldog defense hit a wall. Truman committed 13 errors in six games this week. Prior to this week, the 'Dogs had committed 43 errors in 30 games.

"Our defense is very good," head coach Dan Davis said. "Even the best teams — even the Yankees — make errors. They have defensive breakdowns. That stuff happens in a long season. We'll recover from it."

Truman currently is sixth in the MIAA with a .955 fielding percentage.

Sophomore outfielder Kenny Swanson leads the Bulldogs with a .988 fielding percentage. In 80 chances this season, Swanson has committed just one error.

Softball: Team snaps MIAA losing streak

The softball team's win yesterday against Washburn was the seventh conference game that the Bulldogs have played this season. The win snapped Truman's six-game losing streak.

The Bulldogs' losing streak was the longest Truman has experienced since 1997. In 1997, the Bulldogs needed six games to win against an MIAA opponent. Other than that season, the Bulldogs have not started conference play with a losing streak of longer than three games. In the previous two seasons that Erin Brown has been head coach, the Bulldogs lost their first three conference games before their first conference win.

Roller hockey bows out early in nationals

Team loses 6-5 in overtime after dramatic finish to regulation

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

The blade of a hockey stick kept the Bulldogs' hopes for a national championship alive for a little bit longer.

Senior goalie John Pecher made what he described as one of the most memorable saves of his career in the Bulldogs' game against the University of Tampa in the first round of the playoffs last Saturday.

With 15 seconds left on the clock and the score knotted at 5-5, a Tampa player launched a shot. Pecher was separated from the goal by another Tampa player.

"My stomach dropped, and I was like, 'Oh crap, this is it,'" Pecher said. "'We're done, this is it.' And [the Tampa player] shot it right into the paddle of my stick. I just scooped it right underneath me."

Freshman Cody Dependahl took

the puck after the drop and skated down the rink. With just a few seconds left on the clock, Dependahl launched a meticulously aimed shot at the opposing goal. The puck sailed in, but he waited a fraction of a second too long as the timer ran out.

"I've been telling people, the only reason that goal wasn't counted was because [Dependahl] is so precise with his shots," Pecher said. "He'll take an extra second to take that shot, but he will hit the open spot every time. It's unlike anything I've ever seen. He held onto the puck an extra split second that had he not held on, it probably wouldn't have gone in."

The two teams played into overtime, but the Bulldogs eventually fell 6-5. A little less than 10 minutes into the overtime period, Tampa sunk the final goal of the game and sent Truman home.

Head coach Joe Nedelec said that when Dependahl did not score a goal at the end of regulation, he knew bad luck was afoot for Truman.

"I'm a scientist, so I don't have much superstition in any area ...

except for hockey," Nedelec said. "When that sort of thing happens, it's usually bad news because the 'hockey gods,' as I like to say, are not on your side."

This loss came as a surprise to the Bulldogs, who beat Tampa 7-2 earlier in the season. Tampa had the Bulldogs on the ropes early in the game. The Bulldogs were down 5-1 by the middle of the second period, but they mounted a four-goal comeback to push the game into overtime.

Truman was hampered by penalties throughout the game. In the first period, Truman lost senior defender Neil Bales for the rest of the game on a spearing penalty, and the team spent a total of 30 minutes in the penalty box. With Bales gone, the Bulldogs were left with only three defenders for the rest of the game. The combination of a tired backline

and so much time spent in the penalty box allowed Tampa to score four power-play goals, including the fateful overtime goal.

Truman arrived in the playoff portion of the tournament already under more pressure than the Bulldogs would have liked. Truman dropped one of its three games in pool play and came in as the No. 5 seed in the bracket, much lower than the first seed the Bulldogs hoped to claim.

This marked the third time Truman has gone into the National Tournament as a favorite but has failed to live up to expectations.

"We were in the van on the way back to the airport, and [senior] Truman Patterson was talking about stuff and he said, 'We have grossly underachieved in every post-season tournament,'" Nedelec said. "In three regionals we have been sec-

ond place, and two years in a row now we've come in as [one of] the top three in the nation ... and lost very early."

This tournament marked the last time Nedelec would represent Truman as the roller hockey coach. This also marks the last tournament for many seniors on the team. Possible departures from the team are Pecher, Bales, forward Jon Watson and defender Jim Dougherty.

Nedelec and Pecher both said they think next year will be a rebuilding year for the Bulldogs but also a pivotal one for the club. They said the younger players on the team will have to assume leadership roles vacated by the seniors who are leaving, as well as find a way to fill their coaching position.

"It's definitely a disappointment [to lose Nedelec]," Dependahl said. "Seeing Joe leave is going to hurt us. He was able to do a lot of the paperwork and behind-the-scenes stuff that is going to make it a little bit harder for the guys on the team next year. Not having a coach and him leaving, it's going to be tough."

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