

PERSHING | New court will be the second replacement in last three years

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an unfamiliar setting, Skoch said the gym at the primary school is "actually a very nice volleyball venue."

The gym seats 1,000 fans, and Skoch and Wollmering said it's possible Truman will have bigger-than-usual crowds on hand for its three September home matches.

"With volleyball really being new in the community [maybe we can get] these young girls in the community involved and see a high level of volleyball," Wollmering said. "We're actually excited about that aspect of it. We hope that every junior high and high school volleyball player wants to come watch the match. And maybe their parents will come with them."

Senior outside hitter Eli Medina said she and her teammates can't let the Pershing situation distract them from their goal of advancing far into the NCAA Tournament.

"It's my last year — along with five other [seniors] on the team — and we're not going to let something like playing in a different gym stop us from succeeding," Medina said.

The damage to Pershing Arena currently is only affecting the volleyball

team, but if the floor is not completed by October, the men's and women's basketball teams also will be affected. Basketball begins practice Oct. 15, which is why Wollmering is adamant that the floor be completed by the end of September.

Men's basketball head coach Jack Schrader said the damage to the floor shouldn't affect the conditioning work his team does prior to Oct. 15.

"We do conditioning, but we do most of that outside or we can do it on the side courts," he said. "It's not that big of deal."

Schrader said the biggest inconvenience of the damaged floor is that his team will have to find another location to play pickup games.

"They'll have to find a time and a place," Schrader said. "They could play at the Rec Center or something like that. They've had to do that in the past too because they can't play everyday here."

The men's basketball season is scheduled to open at home Nov. 15, and the women's basketball team's first home game is slated for Nov. 19. If the new floor is installed by October, the first game played on it will be an Oct. 11 volleyball match against the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

ANSWERS | Columnist gives quick overview of Truman athletics to provide basic Bulldog information for incoming freshmen

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Missouri State Bearcats. The Truman football team's Sept. 20 game against Northwest will be the 87th playing of the Ol' Hickory Stick Game, Div. II's oldest trophy game.

Although Northwest has dominated the rivalry in football for the past decade, the Bulldogs generally have the upper hand in sports like women's soccer and volleyball.

The Bearcats are Truman's top rival across the board, but other strong rivalries exist, including Nebraska-Omaha in women's soccer and Central Missouri in volleyball.

Question: Which Bulldog teams are the best?

Answer: The women's teams. In the last decade, the Bulldog women have racked up 30 conference championships and won seven national titles.

The national titles all are courtesy of the women's swim team, which has finished first or second in the nation in each of the last nine years.

The men's side, however, is no slouch. In fact, of the 13 Truman teams that keep a win-loss record, nine had winning seasons last year.

And of the eight teams that don't keep a win-loss record, five teams had individual athletes who qualified for nationals.

Question: Who are the best athletes?

There are countless standout athletes at Truman. Just because Truman isn't a Div. I school doesn't mean the athletes aren't talented.

But there are three names in particular to remember. First is Matt Ticich, the football team's senior quarterback.

Ticich was second in the MIAA in passing yards and first in touchdown passes in 2007. He could make a run this year at the Harlon Hill Award, Div. II's version of the Heisman Trophy.

Next is Georgia Mueller, a senior forward on the women's basketball team. Mueller, the 2007-08 Index Athlete of the Year, led the conference by

averaging 22 points per game last season and is a strong candidate for MIAA Most Valuable Player.

Finally, there is Kate Aherne, a junior on the women's swim team.

If the Bulldogs are to claim an eighth national title this year, they'll likely need another standout performance from Aherne. She racked up seven individual or relay top-nine finishes at nationals last year and is the defending national champion in the 200-yard individual medley.

Question: How is the atmosphere at Truman games?

Answer: To put it bluntly, it stinks. The football team and the men's and women's basketball teams all ranked at or near the bottom of the MIAA in average home attendance.

Now that you're equipped with enough basic knowledge to be a Bulldog fan, go out and watch a few games this season — even if it does mean putting off washing those dirty jeans. You can get one more day out of them.

FIELD | Team will probably not play on turf until first game against S & T

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teams playing on either Sprint Turf or FieldTurf. All the different kinds of turf are a similar product, but are manufactured by different companies.

Truman's synthetic surface will be AstroTurf Gameday Grass 3D.

Head football coach Shannon Currier said that come game time it won't be a disadvantage if Truman hasn't had the opportunity to practice on the new field.

"We're probably not going to get that opportunity until game week," Currier said. "We're hopeful it's done before the first game, but we're the home team so the opponent will not have had the opportunity to play on it. We're just anxious because it's going to be a nice surface for us to practice on."

Ryan Nourse, the team's defensive coordinator, echoed Currier's views. He said the turf surface plays the same as grass except that it is easier on the players.

"The only advantage I think from practicing on the field turf is that it really limits the soreness and pounding that you get practicing on grass consistently," Nourse said.

"It's a much softer surface. ... When you get out on grass, and you've got bumps and mumps that have been tore up. When you get on turf, you get a true consistent surface. It's much less restrictive on your joints."

When it comes to the games, Nourse said the surface will not play much differently than grass. Players will still wear the same types of shoes. The only differences might be the field surface being hotter on sunny days because of the rubber and footballs getting truer hops because of the flatter surface.

"Some people talk about speed difference between grass and turf," said Steve Quinn, Southern Arkansas head coach, whose team plays on a synthetic field. "I just know from the turf out here from speaking to

the coaches and the players — they feel that it's the same, as far as giving away, the balance, the rubber, the softness."

The new surface at Stokes Stadium will not just be used for Truman football games when finished.

Because of the field turf's synthetic makeup, it does not tear up as easily as grass, which allows it to be used more often.

The new field also will drain better than natural grass, which will permit it to be used on days when it has rained.

"We're taking a field that we used to use basically 10 days a year, and now we might be using it two to three hundred days a year," Wollmering said. "For example, we are going to have a high school game on here on a Friday night before one of our games where, obviously in a grass field we wouldn't do that."

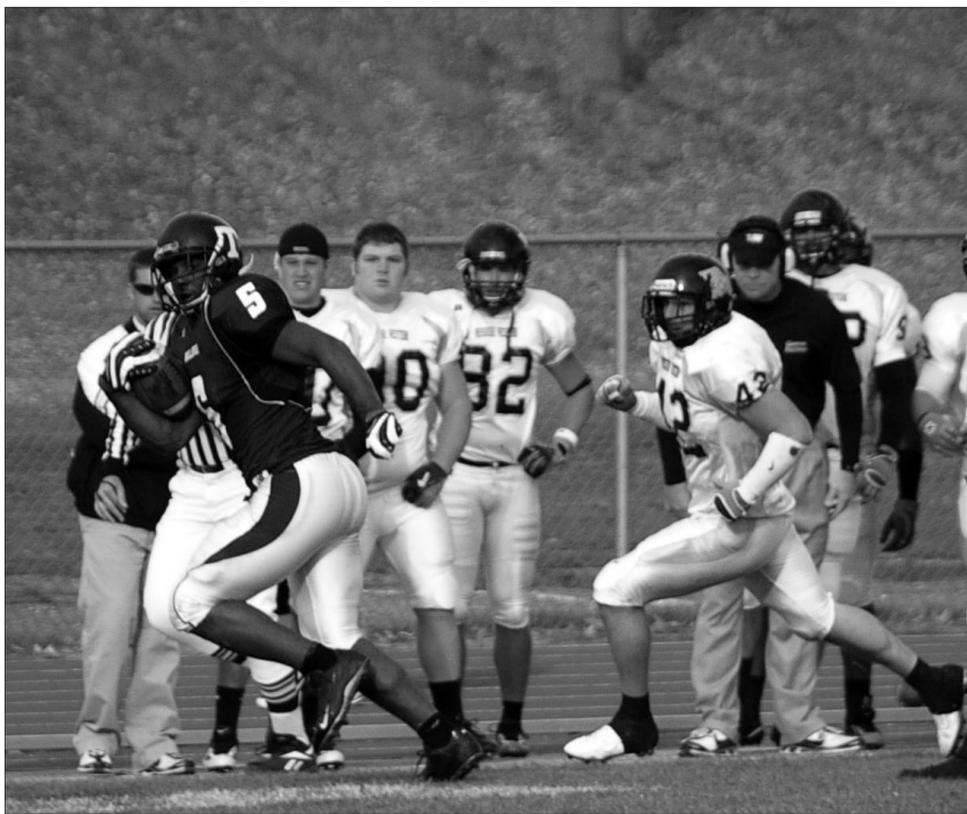
Wollmering said the field also could be used for other activities, including soccer, band and baseball and softball practices in the spring.

Women's soccer coach Mike Cannon said the team would practice on the turf surface at most two days before its turf games, as well as on poor weather days.

"Where in the past we would try to get in the gym because there was really nowhere else to go," Cannon said.

"But now, if football is not practicing we can probably get down there later in the day, probably under the lights. I'm sure men's soccer will probably be in the same situation. Other than that, we might use it on a couple weeks where there are a couple of the conference schools that play on turf."

Although the soccer teams will have access to the turf field, they probably won't use it often. The women's team plays only two of its 12 away games on a turf surface, against Washburn and Missouri Western.



File Photo

Junior running back Marvin Bemby streaks up the sideline against Missouri Western last fall. Head coach Shannon Currier said improving the running game is important for a balanced offensive attack this season.

Football | New defensive coordinator brings experience to a defense that gave up 37 points and 464 yards per game in 2007 campaign

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two-time all-MIAA quarterback Matt Ticich. Other than alumnus Jake Cunningham, Ticich will have 11 of 12 receivers back who caught a pass last season, including honorable mention all-conference senior tight end Ryan King and junior Vanness Emokpae, who led the team with 462 yards receiving.

Ticich owns the third spot on the Truman single-season leaders for total offense and touchdown passes, and he is eighth in career passing yards, having only played two seasons. He also passed for 493 yards and a single-game school record against Upper Iowa University last fall.

"He throws the ball pretty well, makes good decisions, mobile, and then just the intangibles you can see he brings to his teammates with his leadership capabilities and the qualities that he has," said Kevin Verdugo, Fort Hays State University head coach.

As good as the passing game will be in the team's spread offense, it's the running game the team is working to improve. Ticich said the offensive system has changed to more downhill running and more misdirection and that it should result in fewer

plays going for a loss. Senior Jon Franz, an honorable-mention all-conference pick, will anchor the offensive line.

The running attack averaged 3.5 yards a carry last year and 114.3 yards a game. With Cunningham gone, as many as four or five running backs could see playing time this year.

"Our main focus is to run the ball better," Currier said. "And we're going to have more productive passing than we've had the last four years. But hopefully we can get our running game going and then our play-action game will become better. We're taking more time off the clock, keeping our defense off of the field."

New to the program is defensive coordinator Ryan Nourse, who will try to turn around a defense that was ranked 137 out of 144 Div. II teams last year. He is coming off a season during which he was named the NAIA's assistant coach of the year.

Nourse will stick with the basic 3-4 format. He has the starting front seven returning from last season, which will include three all-MIAA players: senior defensive end Les

Hammers, senior linebacker Mike Phillips and senior nose tackle Andy Swedenhjelm. Phillips was the team leader in tackles and Hammers fought off double-teams to record 6.5 sacks last year. According to the Media Guide depth chart, sophomore John Brandon Crawford and junior Derek Rodriguez will replace team leaders Jesse Cooper and James Thabuteau in the secondary.

"The biggest thing [Nourse has] done has just made everything more simple," Phillips said. "Everything is a lot easier for guys to remember. Part of the problem last year was not being on the same page, but this year there's no reason why we shouldn't be."

Nourse will have his work cut out for him as the defense gave up 241.9 yards rushing and 37.1 points per game last season, including three games in which it gave up more than 50.

Junior kicker and second team all-MIAA Mickey Masucci, who was 10 for 13 in field goals last season, will return for special teams. The punting duties will go to redshirt freshman Max Kleckner. Junior Albert Coker and senior Phil Kenney return for punt and kick returns.

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