

Men's basketball suffers first loss

BY JACK NICHOLL
Assistant Sports Editor

The men's basketball team faced its most difficult test of the season last night.

The response was the 'Dogs first loss, which came against an undefeated team in Missouri Southern State University, after Truman's five straight wins to begin the year.

A late comeback effort fell short as the 'Dogs (5-1, 0-1 MIAA) were defeated 65-56 in the conference opener at Pershing Arena.

"Any team in this conference is going to be a hard team, better than any of those exhibition games," sophomore forward Ethan Freeman said. "I think that we were pretty well prepared for them but we didn't start to play our game until the second half."

The 'Dogs were held to season-lows in points and field-goal and free-throw percentage, but most of the damage came in the first half. The Lions' eight-point lead going into the locker room was basically the difference in the game.

Truman shot 50 percent from the field in the second half but only 37 percent overall. The Bulldogs were down 50-31 with 13:39 to go but they came within five with 1:28 left in the game.

"We realized the way we were playing was unaccept-

able, and I think we all knew that," Freeman said. "I think we all had to pick it up, and we did. But by that time it was obviously too late."

Southern played a full-court press on nearly every possession. The Lions double-teamed and tried to trap the person with the ball, and on multiple occasions Truman turned the ball over before they were able to cross the halfcourt line.

The 'Dogs tied a season-high with 16 turnovers and they forced 11.

"They hang their hat on their pressure defense," head coach Jack Schrader said before the game. "They try to make you turn the ball over. They sort of developed that personality last year in a successful form so they are trying to do the same this year and when they do that, and they are successful, then that makes their half-court offense better too."

Before the game Schrader said the turnover battle would be one of the most important things for the 'Dogs. Seven of the nine players who saw playing time had at least one turnover.

"We're playing what we call, 'Play the game first, run the offense second,'" Schrader said. "So if we're able to do that and not turn the ball over and not give them easy baskets then that's

to our advantage."

Early foul trouble in the second half led to Mo. Southern getting in the bonus with more than 14 minutes to go. Truman also got in the bonus early, at the 10:48 mark, but it was the Lions who were able to make free throws down the stretch. The Lions were 77 percent from the line compared to 57 percent for Truman.

Junior forward Patrick Fandja said not only did the missed free throws hurt Truman but the foul trouble did as well because of the players subbing in and out. Fandja and senior guard Banks Estridge had four fouls apiece.

Sophomore guard Alex Henderson was the leading scorer for the 'Dogs as he had 16 points on 6-for-10 shooting, including four three-pointers. He was the only Bulldog to make more than one field goal in the first half, and he played all but two minutes in the game. Fandja had 11 points, with nine coming off of free throws.

Truman held MSSU's leading scorer, Vincent Ateba, to 13 points but could not contain the Lions' point guard, Skyler Bowlin. Bowlin, whom Schrader called the Lion's catalyst before the game, had a game-high 17 points on 6-for-12 shooting.

"He was freshman of the year last year, and he's sort of the guy who gets them going," Schrader said.

The Bulldogs next play at Pittsburgh State. University on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. It will be Truman's first road game of the season.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Sophomore guard Alex Henderson shoots a three pointer in last night's game. Henderson drained four threes and scored 16 points on 6-for-10 shooting in Truman's 65-56 loss.

Hitting Their Mark

Comparison of FT percentages from last season to this season

| | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Banks Estridge | 59.5 % | 81.8 % |
| Patrick Fandja | 69.9 % | 73.7 % |
| Ethan Freeman | 49.5 % | 59.5 % |
| Brandon Griffin | NA | 77.3 % |
| Alex Henderson | 86.8 % | 62.5 % |
| Brian Nwelue | NA | 100 % |
| Stefan Garrison | 66.7 % | 75.0 % |
| Gabe Landau | 68.2 % | 85.7 % |
| Team | 66.2 % | 71.7 % |

* Percentages as of Dec. 2 *
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Bulldogs improve at line

BY JACK NICHOLL
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One minute into the game against Central Christian University (Mo.) on Nov. 20, two simple shots were attempted that have defined the young Truman men's basketball season.

With the score tied 2-2, sophomore forward Ethan Freeman made consecutive free throws to give the 'Dogs the lead for good.

For Freeman, the shots were nothing new — he's had plenty during his collegiate career.

But this season, Freeman — and the team as a whole — is making them count. Heading into last night's game against Missouri Southern State University, the 'Dogs had shot 71.7 percent from the line and free throws had accounted for more than 20 percent of their points.

The results show. Truman is 2-1 this season in games decided by 10 points or less. Last year, they were 2-13 in that category and they averaged 66.2 percent from the line.

"In games in the future it's going to be guaranteed to come down to who makes free throws," Freeman said after Truman's 66-62 victory against Quincy University on Nov. 18. "I think we're going to be more focused and concentrated on them and that's definitely what it's going to take."

The 'Dogs have shot less than 66 percent in only one game this sea-

son, and they are averaging more than 70 percent in the second half.

Against Quincy, Truman shot 70 percent overall and was 20-for-28 in the last 20 minutes. In the 65-59 victory against the University of Missouri-St. Louis on Nov. 11, Truman was 18-for-25 (72 percent) in the second half and shot 75 percent for the game.

"It's confidence," head coach Jack Schrader said. "You win close games by making free throws. That's huge."

Schrader said the 'Dogs have not changed the way they practice free throws, but the difference has been that good free throw shooters are drawing the majority of fouls.

Nearly everyone on the team has improved, with Freeman showing the most notable difference. In 2007-08, he took the most free throws on the team, but only made 49.5 percent. This season, the percentage was up to 71.4 percent prior to the game against MSSU.

"I think he's just matured," Schrader said. "He probably practiced them in the summer. He probably practiced making shots, started getting confident. Maybe he has shot them at the right time of the game so far that he's gotten confidence making them in the games."

All eight Bulldogs who average at least 15 minutes per game are shooting better than 60 percent, and seven of them are above 70 percent. After

slumping at the line last season, senior guard Banks Estridge is back to his sophomore form. He is shooting above 80 percent, and sophomore transfer guard Brian Nwelue was a perfect 8-for-8 prior to last night's game.

The multiple players with high percentages make it harder for opposing teams to foul at the end of the game. Defenses cannot focus their efforts on just one person.

"Coach doesn't [have to] worry about substitution," senior forward Patrick Fandja said. "He knows almost anybody can make free throws, and so we keep the lineup we want at the end of the game."

Fandja said many players on the team knew they had areas they needed to improve on in the offseason, such as free throws, and they did just that.

Truman has averaged more than 20 free-throw attempts a game this season. The Bulldogs shot at least 28 free throws in their two close wins, but Schrader said the higher number of foul shots also has to do with aggressiveness.

"The makeup of the team is a little bit more slashers, taking the ball to the basket, posting up," Schrader said.

Only about one-fifth of Truman's total shots have been of the three-point variety. Last season, they shot a three-pointer more than one-fourth of the time. Only Estridge and sophomore guard Alex Henderson have had at least 10 three-point attempts.

"In practice coach emphasizes, 'Attack the basket,'" Fandja said. "Even if you [are] open, if you see a [lane], attack the basket."

"You win close games by making free throws."

Jack Schrader
Head Coach



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