



File Photo
Junior Kyle Schlotz readies for a shot during practice. Schlotz won his singles match in a 5-4 victory against Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville on Thursday and finished third at the Principia Tourney.

Men's tennis tops Div. I SIUE, claims top spots at Principia

BY JACK NICHOLL
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The men's tennis team only needed to win one of its final two matches to gain a season-opening dual-meet victory against Div. I Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville last Thursday.

Both matches went to the third set and both ended at the same time. No. 1 singles player junior Peter Bracha lost his third set 6-3, but junior Steven Hipkiss sealed a 5-4 dual-meet win with a 7-6, 2-6, 6-2 victory in No. 2 singles.

Overall, five of the six singles matches went to three sets and the No. 1 doubles match was won 9-8 in SIUE's favor. The 'Dogs now are 3-0 in dual matches this season, including the fall.

The dual-meet was a good complement to the weekend Principia Tournament in Elmhurst, Ill., where Truman won every flight in singles and doubles.

"Everybody got to play a lot of tennis, and that's the idea," head coach Pete Kendall said. "Everybody won almost all of their matches, and that's great coming off the win against SIUE. SIUE was a real good one for us to start the spring season."

The dual meet victory reversed a

5-4 Truman defeat at the hands of the Cougars last season.

The men fell behind 2-1 after the doubles matches, as Hipkiss and Bracha claimed the only victory at No. 2. But wins in the No. 2 through No. 5 singles flights gave the Bulldogs the win.

One of the victories was freshman Eric McCollough in No. 5 singles. He lost the first set 5-7, but came back to win the next two sets 6-1.

"I tried to be more consistent the second set," McCollough said. "I was trying to go for too much the first set, and I realized that if I was just consistent, that he made the mistakes usually."

At the Principia Tournament, no one did worse than a semifinal finish. Bracha won flight A singles (6-0, 6-2), McCollough won flight B (6-4, 0-6, 10-3) and sophomore Colin Boswell and junior David Sherwood tied for first in flight C. Many people were moved up a spot because junior John Rothfusz did not play singles during the tournament.

Junior Kyle Schlotz, who finished third in flight B, won an 11-9 super tiebreaker in one of the last matches of the day. Bracha, Boswell and Sherwood did not drop a set in their three victories, and McCollough cruised

until his final.

"In the finals, first set I played amazing," McCollough said. "Second set I didn't play as well and then in the tiebreak I just pulled it out."

In doubles competition at the tournament, Truman won every match but one by at least an 8-2 margin to claim victories in all three flights.

Every Truman singles player was given a bye in the first round because the Bulldogs came in as the favorite. Their dominance was no surprise.

"The Principia Tournament, we should win," Rothfusz, who was part of the No. 1 doubles pairing, said before the meet. "We're better than all the teams there, so we should definitely look for really good results."

The 'Dogs have a month-long stretch without competing before their conference opener against Southwest Baptist University March 20 in Bolivar, Mo. The men did not practice this week, but they will start back up next week when the weather is warm.

"Normally we would have three men's and three women's matches in two weeks, which is about perfect," Kendall said. "That was just kind of a fluke this year."

Principia was the last tournament the 'Dogs will play this season until the MIAA Championships on April 25.

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Stokes, junior Andrew McCall and freshman Eric Kaestner. Head coach Mark Gole said Kaestner started the relay and set a school record in his 50-yard backstroke split.

"We knew we were going to be close," Gole said. "It took two superhuman swims for that event to qualify. Kaestner's lead-off leg and Jason Stokes' anchor leg led us to nationals."

Kaestner also earned an A cut in the 100-yard butterfly with a time of 49.14. It was his first individual A cut of the year. He already had qualified for nationals in one event, the 200-yard freestyle relay, during the Indiana Hoosierland meet in the fall.

Freshman Brian Tillis said the Bulldogs had a great week.

"[The meet went] surprisingly well," Tillis said. "We were able to

get more people to nationals than we had anticipated. Overall, we had lifetime-best swims from most people. From top to bottom, it was probably the best meet of the season."

Two freshman swimmers also had impressive meets. Zac Litzau and Robert Markie both turned in B-cut times for the first time this year. Markie earned B cuts in the 100-yard breaststroke and the 200-yard butterfly. Litzau earned his B cuts in the 500-yard freestyle and the 1,650-yard freestyle. He improved his 1,650-yard freestyle time by 37 seconds, and Gole said Litzau had a solid meet overall.

Tillis was two seconds away from an A-cut time in the 1,650-yard freestyle. He finished with two B-cut times, one in the 1,650-yard freestyle and another in the 500-yard freestyle. Gole said Tillis will get one more shot at the

Last Chance Meet this weekend.

"Tillis is a guarantee to go to [the Last Chance Meet]," Gole said. "He really just took [the 1,650-yard freestyle] out a little too fast. It really kind of took away from the latter half of the race."

The Last Chance Meet will be Friday and Saturday at the University of Chicago. This meet gives the swimmers one more opportunity to turn in an A-cut time before the season ends. Tillis said he has a few things to work on before the meet. Tillis will be swimming the 1,650-yard freestyle at the meet.

"My pacing for my mile was a little off," Tillis said. "I went out too fast and didn't have energy at the end. The mile also has 65 flip-turns, and if you do them all a little faster, you can lose a big chunk of time at the end."

SOFTBALL | Four freshmen and one transfer added to team in offseason

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it everything that we have."

On paper, the Bulldogs appear to have taken a step back during the offseason. They lost six seniors from the 2007-08 team, including All-American right-fielder Christen Belcher and pitcher Katie Noski. Truman finished a game above .500 last year at 22-21 and 8-10 in the MIAA.

The overall record was a little deceptive, however. The Bulldogs lost 16 of those games by a margin of two runs or fewer, and Truman outscored its opponents by a margin of 169-120. While the loss of Belcher, who had a team-leading 39 runs and 42 stolen bases, leaves a hole at the top of the offense, it is something that the team hopes the new talent can fill.

"We have a lot of new girls, so we have a young team," senior outfielder Dani Mayer said. "I still expect us to be a strong team because we have a lot of talent on our team."

With the loss of so many seniors, younger players have an opportunity to step onto the field and show off their skills. Four freshmen are on the roster, and several of them have made strong cases to start for the upcoming season. Freshman outfielder Katie Pitts will be the starting right fielder, the spot vacated by Belcher. Brown said she hopes that Pitts' combination of tools will help offset some of the production the team lost. Freshman infielder Katie Manly also will see some time at first base this spring.

The team also returns a strong core of veterans. Among them are three captains: Mayer, senior infielder Kali Holleran and junior catcher Erica LaCombe. Three other seniors will fill out the veteran Bulldog ranks.

The 2008 squad utilized its speed and high on-base percentage to manufacture runs, with Belcher leading off to create as many opportunities as possible. Even with the loss of the six seniors, the idea remains the same.

The team returns with its second



File Photo
The softball team begins its season tomorrow at the Alabama Huntsville Tournament, where they have six games scheduled in three days.

and third most prolific base stealers this season in Mayer and LaCombe, who had 28 and 12 stolen bags, respectively. With a combination of base stealing and high batting averages, the Bulldogs hope to win many of the close games they were not able to win last season.

The Bulldogs also return a majority of the defense that managed a fielding percentage of .969 last season. That defense is good enough in Brown's eyes to play behind a pitching staff that pitches to contact and generates ground balls. Brown said she is confident that the defense can manage ground balls "all day long."

The Bulldog staff has quite a different look from the staff of last season.

Senior Stephanie Johnson, the only returning pitcher, ranked second on the staff in innings (88.0), ERA (3.34) and strikeouts (59) and had a record of 6-12 last season.

Freshman Ashley Rotkovich steps into the Bulldog staff in her first year at Truman. Also stepping into the

Truman rotation is transfer junior Richelle van Gennip. Van Gennip is a transfer from Crowder Community College (Mo.), where she posted a 1.34 ERA and a 10-4 record. Van Gennip also was a standout at first base, where she hit .349 and drove in 47 runs.

"I think [the pitching staff is] going to be good," van Gennip said. "We have three different pitchers, and we all have different things that we're good at."

Brown was reluctant to name an ace for the staff going into the season. She said that each of the three pitchers are very different, and the days they pitch largely will be determined by their opponents.

The Bulldogs kick off a packed schedule this weekend when they head down to the Huntsville, Alabama Tournament, where they will play five games. They begin play 10 a.m. tomorrow against Bellarmine University and then wrap up the weekend Sunday with a game against the University of Southern Indiana at 11 a.m.

the right start because tennis is such a mental game that you want to stay positive, and it's easier to do that if you feel like you're playing well," Blair said.

The flights for the women are unchanged from where they were in the fall. Walther and Blair, the No. 1 and No. 2 singles players, will make up No. 1 doubles. It will be their eighth semester as a pair.

"Neither of us are super, super aggressive," Walther said. "We don't really go for the huge shots, but I think

we are both really consistent and we can keep a lot of balls in play."

Sophomore No. 3 singles Amy Ochs and freshman No. 4 singles Ellen Russell will make up the No. 2 doubles tandem. Freshman Dagmar Velez is No. 5 singles, and sophomore Kelsey Kuykendall is No. 6 singles. Kuykendall and freshman Anna Greenwald will make up the No. 3 doubles team.

The Bulldogs will play in the Principia Tournament this weekend following the SIUE dual. They then

have almost a month off before the home opener against Lincoln University (Mo.) on March 17.

So far this spring, Truman has practiced outside a few times and most of its practices have involved conditioning and hitting in Pershing.

"Just to get a team win right off the bat would be good for confidence, but really, we understand that SIUE has been practicing indoors for months and we haven't played on real tennis courts yet," Blair said.

The A List

After the NSISC meet, the women's swimming team has 16 swimmers qualified for nationals. Last season, the women qualified 14 swimmers and won nationals. Here are those headed to nationals this season:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Kate Aherne | 9. Jessica Jenkot |
| 2. Erika Anderson | 10. Julia Jones |
| 3. Kendra Brunkow | 11. Jessie Lemaster |
| 4. Emily Buss | 12. Claire Myers |
| 5. Amanda Carnes | 13. Stephanie Myers |
| 6. Jacqui Dempsey | 14. Carina Pautz |
| 7. Anna Grinter | 15. Tanya Sylvester |
| 8. Kelli Horner | 16. Krista Tippin |

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CHAMPIONSHIP | Women qualify seven for nationals, improve chances of national repeat

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swimmers' performances and that all the A cuts they got proved that their amped-up work schedule throughout the season did what it was supposed to do.

"I thought [the women's performance] was about as good as we could've asked for," Gole said.

Gole said the many improvements the team made compared to the fall taper meet had a lot to do with training, particularly the training trip to Florida during Winter Break. He said the extra time also helped the younger swimmers grow accustomed to their races.

"A lot of our younger swimmers are learning how to swim their races, [which improved their times from the fall]," Gole said. "Krista Tippin's 200-yard backstroke on Saturday night was just phenomenal, a perfectly swum race. They had, again, another two months [to train], and I always talk about how at Florida you can make or break your season, and our team had an excellent Florida training trip. I was really excited with what they did there, and they just continued working hard all the way."

Gole said before the meet that conference always has been one of the team's best meets because of the great facilities at host Delta State and also the parental support that always follows it to conference.

"The team from top to bottom swam extremely well," Gole said. "People who had national cuts, people

who didn't, it's just collectively, like I said before the meet even started, we typically always swim well down there, and we did it again. It was just a great meet from start to finish."

Tippin said the atmosphere helped not only the swimmers who tapered but those who didn't perform at their fullest potential.

"Our fans were incredible, and the atmosphere was so crazy that everyone was excited, and when you are excited you go faster," Tippin said.

Now that the team is heading into nationals with seven more swimmers

qualified, Tippin said she is confident about how it will match up against its competition.

"I think we have a good chance of performing [at nationals] how we have in the past," Tippin said. "I think we are just going to go out there and do the best that we can."

Gole said that even though he thought he would know where the team would be standing after conference, he still is not sure how the national meet March 11 to 14 in Houston, Texas, will pan out.

"Based on how the rest of the country swam this weekend, [the national championship results] are still a toss-up," Gole said. "Drury and San Diego, in my opinion, are still front-runners. We are right there, and if we can duplicate how we swam this weekend, we might be able to sneak up there and place a little higher than we think, but we really have no idea yet still [of how we are going to do]."

TENNIS | Three veterans lead women's tennis squad, which is coming off of a perfect dual meet record in the fall season

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winning record and should be pretty solid overall."

Eight out of 23 teams from the region will qualify for nationals. This sounds good for the 'Dogs, but both the Lonestar and Heartland conferences have multiple teams ranked in the ITA preseason top 40. The MIAA does not have any ranked, and Kendall said it will be very difficult to get a second team in from the MIAA.

The Bulldogs have not won an

MIAA championship for 10 years but their competition in the MIAA is slightly different than last year. Washburn University retained just one player from last year, SBU lost half its team and Northwest Missouri State University lost a couple of its best players.

However, senior Lindsay Blair said the conference will still be difficult, and it will be important to start off the conference season on a high note.

"It's important that you get off to