

Rugby attempts to reload for spring

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

Offseason was a tumultuous time for the rugby team. After a less-than-stellar fall season in which the team finished 2-5-1, the Bulls lost a significant portion of their upperclassmen. Team captain senior Justin Lacy said that several members quit because of personal reasons, and others graduated or are sitting out the season because of injuries.

These circumstances spelled change for the Bulls. To replace the lost teammates, the rugby team will be forced to call on its sophomores and rookies to step up and fill the void. With their playoffs, the

Westerns, more than likely out of reach for them now, the team will focus on developing their players for next year and having fun.

"We've got some good athletes, we just have to see what kind of game we play now," head coach Bill Sexton said. "The reality is, every time you put a new crew together ... you get a different kind of team. Right now, I'm kind of excited to see how these guys gel because a lot of the guys are so relatively inexperienced, they'll have an opportunity to build ... something new."

Lacy and senior vice-captain Dustin Ralph are among the key returners from the fall season. Sexton said he thinks se-

nior Mike Deckard will provide leadership for the front line and that he expects senior Chester Nay to become a valuable asset to the front line as well.

Sophomore Aaron Loida returns to play a solid half back for the Bulls. He will be expected to run the backline. Alongside Loida, senior Phil Powell returns to the back row. Rookie freshman Logan Clement also will step into the back to provide some fresh blood. After playing rugby in high school, Clement joined the Bulls last semester to give some support on the wing.

A number of other rookies have come out to play for the Bulls this season. With the team looking to rebuild, this provides

them a great opportunity.

"It's always trouble trying to replace people, especially when you lose starters," Lacy said. "But, luckily for us, we've got a couple of new guys coming out, and they showed a lot of potential. They're picking up the game real quick, and it looks like they'll be able to step in. Obviously, come game time, we're going to miss that experience at first, but down the road for the team, it's going to end up being a good thing."

Even though the Bulls have lost many players, they will not veer from the recruitment strategy that has worked well for them in the past. Although they occasionally set up a table to recruit in the Student Union

Building, the team's main tactic still remains word of mouth and the appeal of rugby itself.

"Rugby is a game [where] you either like it or you don't like it," Sexton said. "It's either for you or it's not. The guys that stick with it find something that resonates with them about the game. There's something about the combination of wrestling, basketball, football and soccer that's all rolled up into one game of rugby that guys really like."

The Bulls face a tough schedule early. Once they hit the pitch, they will have to complete all of their league matches by March 21. The Bulls jump into the meat of the schedule this weekend when the team

plays John Brown University (Ark.) on Saturday in Springfield, Mo. The team will head to Kansas to play against the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University the next weekend. The Bulls will wrap up their league matches for the season March 7 with a game against the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"[The spring schedule] is about the same [toughness as the fall]" Loida said. "The only tough part is our league matches are kind of being clumped in the first two weeks. ... We'll find out if that's good or bad. We'll try and be optimistic. Hopefully the other teams haven't been able to prepare as much as we have, either."

Berdine captures A cuts with record swims

BY BLAKE TOPPMAYER
Sports Editor

Senior Andrew Berdine wasted no time attaining his national-qualifying A cut at last week's New South Intercollegiate Swim Conference meet.

In his first individual swim of the meet, Berdine clocked a 1:52.97 in the prelims of the 200-yard individual medley. The time was good for Berdine's career-first A cut and will send the senior to nationals in March for the first time. And the 200 IM is not even Berdine's top event.

"I certainly wasn't expecting it," Berdine said. "Based off of what I did at Indiana [in the fall taper meet], I thought my best chance would be the 400[-yard individual medley] still."

Berdine earned B cuts during each of the past three seasons but never could trim off the final seconds needed to make nationals. With the pressure lifted after he quickly punched his ticket to nationals Thursday in the 200-yard individual medley, Berdine's times just kept improving.

Berdine took first place in the 400-yard individual medley the next day. His time of 3:59.25 shattered the school record by almost four seconds, and Berdine defeated the second-place finisher by almost five seconds. Berdine now has the nation's seventh-fastest time in the event.

Berdine capped off the meet Saturday with another school record in the prelims of the 200-yard backstroke before he claimed third place in the finals of the event.

"This season, he's been on fire since day one, kind of like he's been a man on a mission," head coach



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior Andrew Berdine, shown here at practice, swam two school records last weekend at conference.

Mark Gole said. "And for him to have the meet that he had, I couldn't be happier."

Gole said he could see Berdine's self-assurance growing as Berdine continued to pile up one good swim after another.

"Watching him on the pool deck last week and weekend, it was awesome," Gole said. "He walked around like he owned the place. I love that. It wasn't cocky, it was confidence."

The turning point in Berdine's career came during last season. Berdine came to Truman with the goal of making nationals as a distance freestyle swimmer. But Berdine's times in the distance freestyles started getting slower throughout his career.

Berdine said that after he talked with the team captains, Gole and then-assistant coach Eric Paden during his junior season, he realized it was time to adjust his focus from distance freestyles to individual medleys.

"I just decided that I needed to do mid-distance or I would not make nationals," Berdine said.

Even though the 400-yard individual medley always had been Berdine's top event, a weakness in the breaststroke leg prevented him from getting to nationals before this season. But Berdine said student coach Kyle Ruiz — who swam distance freestyle, the breaststroke and individual medley for the Bulldogs from 2004-08 — has helped him make

improvements in the breaststroke, which accounts for the second leg of the individual medley.

Now the breaststroke no longer hinders Berdine. His second 50-yard split time in the breaststroke leg of the 400-yard individual medley Friday was the fastest breaststroke split of any swimmer in the event.

"[In the past,] he'd be in the lead [before] breast stroke by a lot, but then we'd be like, 'Everybody's going to go flying by him,'" Gole said. "Well, [now] people didn't go flying by him. He actually extended his lead."

With national-qualifying times and school records under his belt, Berdine now can focus on trying to fly past the competition at nationals.

Athlete of the Week

Andrew Berdine
Sport: Men's swimming
Year: Senior
Events: Individual Medley, Backstroke
Hometown: South Lake, Texas

Berdine qualified for nationals with A cuts in the 200- and 400-meter individual medleys and the 200-yard backstroke last weekend at the conference meet. It is the first time Berdine has qualified for nationals. He set a school record by almost four seconds with his time of 3:59.25 in the 400 IM and set another school record in the 200-yard backstroke.

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