

COLUMN | Blue Tigers don't solve scheduling problem, Rockhurst University would be a better fit

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The MIAA had a simple solution to this massive scheduling headache. Instead of adding Lincoln, the MIAA should have added Rockhurst University, which also submitted a bid this winter to join the conference. The MIAA has yet to vote on Rockhurst's possible admission.

Rockhurst, which has men's and women's basketball but does not sponsor football, clears up both the basketball and football scheduling issue. The Hawks would balance the basketball schedule by creating a 12-team MIAA in basketball, yet would let the conference maintain its football format of nine conference games and two non-conference games.

The MIAA still could add Rockhurst later this year, but that would yet again unbalance the basketball schedule and possibly create the need for the conference to split into two divisions, which would dilute many conference rivalries.

Rockhurst also offsets Lincoln's geographical argument that it belongs in the MIAA. Lincoln, located in Jefferson City, does fit well into the MIAA geographically, and it becomes the seventh team in the conference from Missouri. But Rockhurst would be an even better geographical fit.

With its Kansas City location, Rockhurst is almost exactly in the heart of the MIAA. In fact, the MIAA has its conference office in Kansas City and hosts several conference championships in Kansas City each year. Rockhurst would help boost attendance and publicity of these championships.

Finally, the simple fact is that Lincoln doesn't belong in this conference on the competitive level.

Monday on the MIAA's Web site Washburn University's president and conference CEO Jerry Farley said, "The MIAA is arguably the strongest

Division II conference in the nation. Lincoln will only add to our reputation."

Frankly, I just cannot see how this will be the case. To me, Lincoln can only damage the MIAA's competitive reputation. In 2007-08, of Lincoln's five sports that have win-loss records, none had winning seasons. It's true that the Blue Tigers' track program is a national power, but otherwise, Lincoln is weak across the board.

If Lincoln was a member of the MIAA last season, the Blue Tigers would have finished eighth in the U.S. Sports Academy Directors' Cup standings, which measure a school's overall athletic success. And unlike many other MIAA schools that score Directors' Cup points in a variety of sports, Lincoln accumulated all its points in either men's or women's indoor/outdoor track.

It's as though the MIAA suddenly realized it was getting too strong and compensated by adding Lincoln, which provides an easier opponent in football, men's and women's basketball, softball and baseball.

Also, let's not forget that in January 2005, the NCAA penalized Lincoln for NCAA violations and placed the school on probation for four years. According to a 2005 press release on the NCAA's Web site, the penalties resulted from "an investigation into participation by a number of ineligible student-athletes in football, men's basketball, women's cross country, women's track and field and men's golf."

Since then, Lincoln has hired a new athletics director, Paula Jackson, and hopefully Jackson has cleaned up the program. Even so, the violations are a stain on Lincoln's résumé.

Overall, I find the MIAA's addition of Lincoln very puzzling. To me, the Blue Tigers aren't a good fit for the conference.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Andrew McCall swims the breast stroke leg of the 200-meter medley relay at a meet earlier this season. Andrew's brother Peter also forms a leg of the relay team. The duo has qualified for nationals.

McCALLS | Andrew convinced Peter to join the swim team after Peter injured his shoulder playing baseball in his freshman year at Truman

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The conversation proved successful. Gole said that as long as Peter practiced swimming all summer, there would be a spot for him on the team.

Andrew said he at first had no intention of attending Truman. He was tired of being in Peter's shadow, and going to a different college would allow him to escape that. But Andrew said Truman made him an outstanding offer. He also said his relationship with his brother was good enough to

allow them both to be Bulldogs.

"At first, [Peter] decided he was coming [to Truman], and I decided I wasn't going there," Andrew said. "I didn't want to be little Petey anymore. With him not swimming and with the scholarship I received, I changed my mind. We get along well enough that I thought it would be fine."

The brothers both qualified for nationals this year in the 200-yard freestyle relay. This isn't the first time the McCalls have swum a relay together. In high school they

participated in the 200-yard medley relay and were state champions. In that relay they swam the second and third legs of the race, and they continue to do that for the Bulldogs.

Peter said swimming together for the last six years has strengthened their relays.

"We both qualified for nationals the same year, so there was never one significantly held above the other," Peter said. "Basically, we know what to expect out of each other."

Signing | Team focuses on signing offensive and defensive linemen in 2009 class

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linemen I've been a part of coming in here as freshman." The team signed more offensive linemen than any other position except linebacker.

McKinnon just finished only his second year playing football and his first on the offensive line. He played one year on the defensive line before making the switch to the opposite side of the ball. He was named second-team All-District and he received attention from Div. I schools Air Force and Rice, as well as many schools from the Lone Star Conference.

McKinnon had a mentor — NFL Hall of Famer Bruce Matthews — that no one can match. Matthews, who was McKinnon's high school coach, played in 14 consecutive Pro Bowls from 1988-2001.

"[McKinnon] brings the total package — his combination of size, athleticism and physicality will make him a very successful tackle," Currier said in the signing day press release.

McKinnon will compete for playing time on the 'Dogs' offensive line, which at one point last year had four new players starting. Currier said that although he targeted all the positions, offensive line and defensive line were part of the focus of this year's group.

Overall, the 'Dogs signed players from seven different states, including nine from both Illinois and Missouri. They added at least five players at linebacker, offensive line and the secondary.

Currier said he was most impressed by the recruiting on the offensive side of the ball. He said Truman recruited strong at every position except for possibly defensive end.

"We did a great job on offense this year," Currier said. "By far the best of offense recruiting year we've had."

Another signee, quarterback Conrad

Chottel from Kearney, Mo., could compete for the starting job at quarterback. Chottel sent game tape to Truman during his junior season, and he was impressed when he made his official visit.

"I really liked all the guys I met," Chottel said. "I feel like I fit in right along. I feel like I was a perfect fit for Truman and they were a perfect fit for me."

Chottel received the Frank Montana Award last fall, given to the most outstanding high school player in the Kansas City area in Class 1 through Class 4.

Currier said Chottel has a good arm, although he might not be as much of a running quarterback as three-year starting quarterback Matt Ticich was. Chottel will join a number of quarterbacks, including last season's sophomore backup Philip Davis, in competition to replace Ticich.

"That's going to be some big shoes to fill, whoever is going to get the job," Chottel said.

The new players should help offset the multitude of starters the Bulldogs graduated in the offseason, including the entire defensive line, three of four linebackers and Ticich. However, recruiting coordinator Thomas Kearney said he wasn't worried about the turnover.

"I think our last couple recruiting classes have been pretty solid, so we just want to keep stacking good recruits and recruiting classes," he said.

Kearney, who starts recruiting the day after signing day, will start with a list of about 14,000 players and eventually narrow the list to about 300 through film and grade checks. After that, the possible recruits will be ranked at each position and hopefully make official visits to the Truman campus.

"Successful recruiting is when you can get most of the guys that you bring in on official visits, and we [were] able to do that," Kearney said.

LINCOLN | Adding Lincoln will eliminate need for bye week in conference basketball season but creates an uneven number of football teams

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there was no official process until this year. Lincoln submitted a bid letter and a team of four conference officials toured the institution during the fall, according to the Dec. 4 issue of the Index.

Wollmering and Brent Good, the athletics director from Southwest Baptist University, were both in favor of adding Lincoln after the committee made its visit.

"I felt very good about adding them to the conference," Good said. "I think it's a positive. At one time I think they were one of the original members of this conference. So I think it's a good move."

Bob Boerigter, Northwest Missouri State University athletics director, was the leader of the committee that toured Lincoln. He said he was very supportive of Lincoln's admission to the conference.

"Northwest is looking forward to renewing its competitive rivalries with Lincoln University, and we are looking forward to competing on an annual basis in many sports [in] the shadow of our state's capital," Boerigter said in a phone message Wednesday.

Lincoln's record

Lincoln currently has 11 sports, including six that compete in the spring. They won seven Div. II national champions in women's track and field from 2003 to 2007, including five straight outdoor titles.

However, Lincoln is not as strong in other sports. The Bulldogs' women's basketball team beat Lincoln 61-45 earlier this season, and Lincoln's football team lost 68-0 against Missouri University of Science and Technology in the fall.

"They're looking at it long-term," Wollmering said. "But they're going to make their commitment to be a full-fledged competitive member. Now, does that mean in 2010 or in the first few years that they're not going to take their lumps? Who knows."

Lincoln currently does not field teams in volleyball and men's and women's soccer, but Wollmering said adding these sports is part of Lincoln's five-year plan to improve its athletic facilities.

Lincoln has a new president and a new athletics director, and Weiser said Lincoln shows commitment to high-quality athletic programs. Paula Jackson, Lincoln's athletics director, could not be reached for comment.

"I think the MIAA team that made the campus visit was very impressed with their new president, their new athletics director and their commitment to quality programs," Weiser said. "So yeah, I think they have some growth to do in some sports, but they certainly have proven that they know how to do well in some sports

and we get the feeling that they're going to build a nice broad-based program."

Scheduling conflicts

Although Lincoln's admission creates an even number of teams in the MIAA in men's and women's basketball, it also means there are 11 football teams. The odd number in football means that each week one team would have to either play a non-conference game or have a bye.

Southwest Baptist is the only MIAA school that does not play football in the MIAA. It was granted permission from the MIAA to compete independently in the sport beginning in the 2008 season.

Lincoln's admission has created discussion about SBU rejoining the conference in football. Good said that making SBU's football team independent has immensely helped out the program. SBU went 5-6 in the 2008 season after finishing 0-11 in 2007.

"The talk was, well, we bring in Lincoln — SBU, they're going to have to come back and play football,"

Good said. "That came back on discussion. We discussed that, that's not the case right now. We're independent, and that's what was agreed upon by the CEOs, and from my understanding right now, that's where we're going to be. And the vote was made — but things change. But that's where we are."

If SBU did rejoin, teams would be able to play a full 11-game conference schedule with no non-conference games.

"I think some people would like to revisit that issue," Wollmering said. "Whether it gets revisited or not, I don't know. I would be on the side of revisiting it because 12 football schools — that gives you 11 games."

Shannon Currier, Bulldog head football coach, said it would be great if the conference could get to a point where it has 12 football teams. He said that if the Bulldogs did have a bye week, he would rather have it at the beginning of the season.

"I hope that we're able to schedule all of our games with leaving an open game at the beginning or the first or second week, because it's tough to find games in the middle of the season, and you want to play 11," Currier said.

Another option would be to add another team to the conference. Wollmering was part of the team that visited Rockhurst University during December, and he said Newman University (Kan.) also has drawn interest. But neither university has a football team.

"I think at this point my personal opinion is, we kind of need to keep our foot on the brake and decide," Wollmering said. "We're at 12 teams, 12 makes a lot of sense. I think we have the football issue to figure out."

"We get the feeling that they're going to build a nice broad-based program."

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