

First meet in a month looms for track

BY JOCELYN NEBEL
Staff Reporter

Like many New Year's resolutions, track head coach John Cochrane aims to get his team back in shape after a long Winter Break.

The process continues Saturday when the men's and women's indoor track teams travel to Iowa City to compete in the Iowa Hawkeye Open.

The Bulldogs will compete against a wide variety of teams, including Div. I schools such as Iowa State and Chicago State.

"This meet will be like another first meet except it'll be on another level," Cochrane said.

Cochrane said his athletes completed various drills and practices on their own during Winter Break to prepare for the winter season. This week,

Cochrane said he is focusing on conditioning, speed and technical performance to prepare his team for the rest of the season.

Freshman jumper Coedy Walker said he practiced these exercises to prepare for the Hawkeye Open. Walker placed second in the triple and long jumps at the Dec. 13 Highland Open in Kansas during break.

"You kind of have to get a mindset where you're self-motivated and want to improve yourself and stay fit for competitions," Walker said.

Cochrane said that in addition to Walker, he hopes to see some of the men's distance runners like junior Zach Chapman and sophomores Bob Gorman and Josh Mantooh improve their own running.

Cochrane said the men and women throwers also have a lot of talent to offer

the team this winter. Sophomore Alex Van Delft placed first in the shotput and second in the weight throw at the Highland Open.

On the women's team, junior Tessa Letuli and senior Ashley Bernard led the throwers with NCAA provisional marks in the weight throw at the Highland Open. Senior Kortney Holeman also helps to anchor the throwers. Both Holeman and Bernard qualified for nationals last year in outdoor track and field.

Letuli said that because the throwers are prepared for Saturday's meet, this week's practices are just for "getting all the cobwebs out." Letuli also said the Hawkeye Open is more about the team's performance than the individuals.

"It's always competitive no matter where we go within ourselves, but it's never a competition to see who can

come out on top of the rest," Letuli said. "It's all about how well we want each other to do."

Letuli said part of the women throwers' success has come from assistant coach Leslie Hardesty. Letuli said Hardesty seems confident in what she teaches and knows how to coach athletes on an individual level.

"We have about four or five women's weight throwers that could be very good," Cochrane said.

Cochrane also said senior Danna Kelly would be an athlete to watch in distance events. Kelly, an All-American cross country runner, made a provisional mark last year in the 3,000-meter steeplechase and qualified for nationals during the 2007-08 cross country season.

"Kelly should do fairly well right away because she's really fit and she's come off of really good falls," Co-

chrane said.

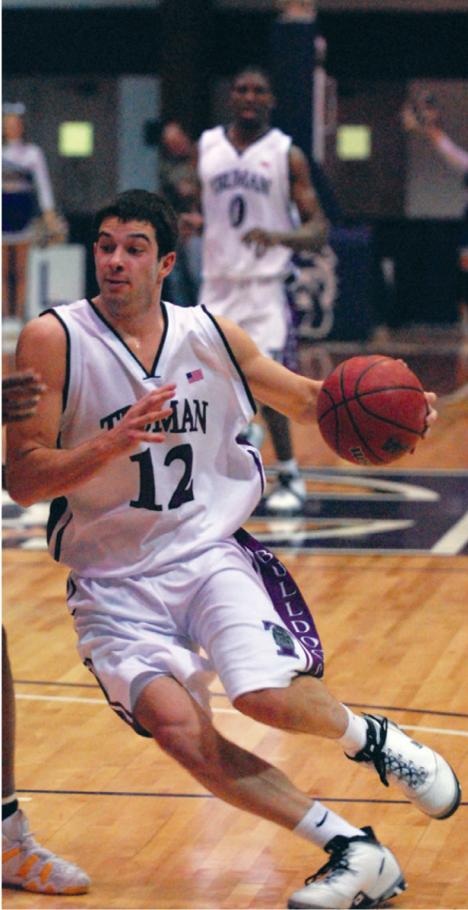
Junior jumper Katrina Biermann also returns to the women's team this season. Biermann won triple jump at the Highland Open during break with a jump of 11.31 meters and participated in the indoor national meet last year.

Cochrane said he has been working more with the jumpers this season because they are a younger team and some of the athletes are still learning events.

Cochrane said some of his athletes are prepared for Saturday's meet, but he still doubts others' readiness.

"The next two meets are very difficult meets, and we probably won't take people who aren't ready to compete on that level," Cochrane said.

After the Hawkeye Open on Saturday, the men's and women's track teams will compete January 23-24 at the Iowa State Open.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior guard Banks Estridge, shown here against Missouri Western, has scored 21 points in two of his last three games.

Estridge nets pair of 21-point games

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

Twenty-one has been Banks Estridge's lucky number for the last week and a half.

In the men's basketball team's game Saturday against Northwest Missouri State University and the Jan. 7 game against the University of Nebraska-Omaha, Estridge nailed 21-point performances. He was 8-for-17 on field goals against NMSU, including four three-pointers. Against UNO, he made eight of his 14 attempts, and again tied a career-high with four three-pointers.

This increase in production has come alongside a new offensive strategy for the Bulldogs, one that head coach Jack Schrader said he thinks is benefiting the whole team.

"I think [the 21-point games] work as a little bit as a function of the adjustments we've made," Schrader said. "We've spread the court a little bit more. Teams had, after our initial success, had begun switching on all exchanges, ... and it put pressure on our shooting. Shooting wasn't very good. I think [Estridge] has really benefited from [the new offense]."

In the four games before the game against UNO, Estridge was held to a high of 11 points, and only was averaging 6.5 points per game during that stretch, while shooting 10-for-29.

The games against Northwest Missouri and UNO are evidence that a new offense and a new attitude have paid off for Estridge.

"I think I was just playing with a little bit of confidence," Estridge said. "I was struggling with my shot the past few games. I just came in with an attitude, 'Play with confidence, shoot with confidence.' I think that helped."

Schrader said he thinks that as one of three seniors on a young Bulldogs team, Estridge sets a good example for the younger players on the roster.

"If [Estridge] is solid, and within that framework of still having his energy, then that gives our younger players a sound foundation," Schrader said.

Schrader also said he thinks that Estridge has become a transition between the older and younger members of the team, as the last hold-over from the Bulldogs NCAA tournament in 2005-2006.

"[Estridge] sort of bridges a gap," Schrader said. "We rebuild, and in that rebuilding process, sometimes we go through a couple of tough years. He's the last of the guys that were on the national tournament team and knows what it takes too, the amount of determination you have to have to get back to that level. He's the bridge between that generation and this current freshman-sophomore group we have."

With this new offensive strategy and Estridge's continued offensive breakout, the Bulldogs hope to finally find traction for their season and steer themselves in a new direction. They currently are mired at the bottom of the MIAA with no conference wins.

"I wouldn't say we've done poorly, because we've been playing pretty well," Estridge said. "We've had a few games we haven't played well. We're still, sadly this far into the season, trying to find ourselves a little bit. We've got a lot of the pieces to be good. ... We're still trying to find it a little bit. I think we will."

In the game against Missouri Western State University last night, Estridge had seven points, nine rebounds and three steals.

Athlete of the Week

Banks Estridge

Sport: Basketball

Year: Senior

Position: Point Guard

Hometown: Eureka, Mo.

Estridge combined to shoot 52 percent from the floor and totaled eight three pointers in the men's basketball team's game Jan. 7 against UNO and Saturday's matchup with Northwest Missouri. He scored 21 points and four threes in each game. The threes tied a career-high.

Want more sports coverage?

Check out the **Index Sports Blog** at
www.indexsports.wordpress.com

On the blog, Index sports reporters will post analysis and opinions on the Truman Bulldogs, Div. I athletics and professional sports.

Readers can chime in with comments and vote in polls