

SPORTS

DEFENSELESS

Women give up season-high points in 87-62 loss

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Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Women's head coach Michael Smith is 4-15 in his first season at Truman, but he hopes to boost the program.

Smith aims to alter team's image

Coach with history of success faces hurdle in righting the women's basketball program

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Sports Editor

Michael Smith, women's basketball head coach, is no stranger to challenges.

He faced one at Angelo State University (Texas). Angelo State finished 0-26 and was one of the worst teams in Div. II basketball in 1996-97, two years before Smith arrived to become Angelo State's first full-time assistant coach. By the end of Smith's four-year tenure as an Angelo State assistant, the Rams were Lone Star Conference champions and qualified for the NCAA Tournament.

Smith encountered another challenge as

head coach at Moberly Area Community College, where he coached from 2002 to 2006. Coaching the poorly funded MACC women's basketball team, Smith had to drive the team bus on game days. But that didn't get in Smith's way. MACC made back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances in Smith's last two seasons there as head coach/bus driver.

"[I'm] always up for a challenge, always up for a challenge," Smith said. "That's what keeps me going."

Smith might be facing the granddaddy of challenges in his latest coaching position, head coach of the Bulldogs. Two-thirds of the way into Smith's first season as Truman's head coach, the 'Dogs are just 4-15 and 1-11 in conference play. That's a far cry from the eight consecutive winning seasons Smith enjoyed from 2000 to 2008 as either assistant coach or head coach.

This season will be the Bulldogs' seventh losing season in the last nine years — and losing doesn't sit well with Smith. Although Smith said he knows he has to be patient, he wants to make sure each of his players understands that his goal is to change the losing perception of Truman women's basketball.

"The first day in our offseason, ... losing is not acceptable," Smith said. "That's day one in our notebooks — losing is not acceptable."

Accomplishing Smith's goal won't be easy. When Smith was hired last spring to replace former head coach John Sloop, Smith entered a program with a cupboard largely empty of talent — save for senior Georgia Mueller, a two-time All-MIAA forward.

The Bulldogs graduated four starters
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Lincoln to learn MIAA fate today

Eight university presidents must vote for Lincoln for it to be added to conference

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Sports Editor

The MIAA is expected to release today the results of a vote by the 11 conference presidents on the possible admission of Lincoln University (Mo.) into the MIAA.

At least eight conference presidents need to vote in favor of Lincoln for the school to be added to the MIAA. If added, the Tigers would begin competing in the conference in 2010-11.

Truman's Interim President Darrell Krueger was out of town Wednesday afternoon and could not be reached for comment.

Truman's Director of Athletics Jerry Wollmering said Krueger has submitted his vote. Wollmering would not officially disclose how Krueger voted but said, "Truman has been supportive of adding Lincoln" to the conference.

The St. Joseph News-Press reported Wednesday that Lincoln should have the support of Northwest Missouri State University. Northwest Missouri's Director of Athletics Bob Boerigter told The St. Joseph News-Press on Monday, "We have been pretty public from day one in our support of Lincoln. I know my president will support them."

The MIAA's institutional representatives council, which is comprised of each school's athletic director, senior women's adviser and faculty representative, already has voted on Lincoln. Wollmering said there was overwhelming support for admitting Lincoln from the institutional representatives council, although Wollmering did not give the exact vote total.

Wollmering said he, Truman's senior women's administrator Linda Anderson and Truman's faculty representative Jeffrey Gall all voted to add Lincoln. The institutional representatives council's vote does not have any official weight, but serves as a guide for MIAA university presidents.

If the MIAA adds Lincoln for the 2010-11 season, it would mark the second time in four years a school has joined the MIAA. The University of Nebraska-Omaha began competing in the conference in 2007-08.

Rockhurst University also has submitted a bid to join the conference. No vote on Rockhurst potentially joining the conference is expected until later this spring.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Senior guard Banks Estridge attempts an acrobatic shot during last night's game against Pitt State. Estridge scored 13 points. The men trailed by 11 at half but a comeback effort led to a one-point loss.

Men lose in a thriller

BY JACK NICHOLL
Assistant Sports Editor

The men's basketball team fell just short of their second-straight dramatic home victory last night in Pershing Arena.

With nine seconds left, Pittsburg State University's Spencer Magana missed the front half of a 1-and-1. Senior guard Banks Estridge then took the ball the length of the floor, but his contested layup missed after bouncing against the rim several times.

"We run a play called crush — that's what we wanted," head coach Jack Schrader said after the game. "It could have rolled in, it rolled out."

The result for Truman (6-13, 1-11 MIAA) was a 60-59 defeat at the hands of the Gorillas (9-10, 4-8 MIAA).

The excitement began in the second half, with seven ties and six lead changes coming after halftime. Neither team led by more than four points in the last 17 minutes.

The Bulldogs almost immediately erased an 11-point first-half deficit with an 11-2 run to begin the second half. Freshman center Vesko Filchev sparked the run with six points.

After that, the 'Dogs never let up. Sophomore guard Brandon Griffin had seven points and six rebounds, all in the last 20 minutes,

and Truman converted on multiple three-point plays.

"We just smashed them at the beginning [of the half]," Filchev said. "That's how we win games."

On multiple occasions it looked like Truman could take over the game, but Pitt State always responded.

In the first half, the Bulldogs fell behind by as many as 12, as the Gorillas out-rebounded Truman 19-to-11. Truman made just one field goal in the last seven minutes to close out the first half.

"Out-rebounding is definitely a big part of this game," Filchev said. "They grabbed offensive rebounds, and they scored off that."

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Special Olympics athletes show love of game

Jared Niemeyer proudly displayed his Kirksville uniform as he sat court side in Pershing Arena last night.

Beads of sweat on Jared's forehead demonstrated the effort he put forth playing for five minutes with his team.

Jared was one of 14 athletes from the Northeast Missouri area to compete in the Special Olympics exhibition basketball game last night during halftime of the Truman women's basketball game.

COMMENTARY



Blake Toppmeyer

Despite Jared's best efforts, he didn't sink a basket last night.

But you couldn't tell that by looking at Jared's face. As he sat in the first row of the bleachers after the Special Olympics game, Jared couldn't stop smiling.

"I'm just very happy," said Jared, 17.

Last night's game was played in part to help raise awareness for the Feb. 14 Polar Bear Plunge, an event in which participants dive into the cold waters at Thousand Hills Lake to help raise money for Special Olympics Missouri. Truman also will host the Special Olympics track and field games in April.

Freshman Michelle Thornton helped organize last night's basketball game. Thornton, a member of the Truman chapter of the Student Council for Exceptional Children, helps coach the Kirksville team. She said she's volunteered for Special Olympics for about seven years and was drawn to volunteering by her brother, who has autism and competes in the Special Olympics.

"For me it's just really cool," Thornton said. "I've always enjoyed being involved in it."

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3-PT percentage holds steady

BY JACK NICHOLL
Assistant Sports Editor

The signs came early and often that the new NCAA men's basketball three-point line would have no effect on Bulldog basketball.

In the season opener against William Woods University on Nov. 15, senior guard Banks Estridge sank the first three-point shot of the season. At the end of the game, the 'Dogs were 5-for-14 — a 35.7 percentage — from beyond the arc. They shot 33.4 percent in the statistic last year.

"Invariably, if a guy is a three-point shooter, it doesn't make any difference where it was at or where it is at now," head coach Jack Schrader said.

Before the season, the NCAA moved the men's three-point line back to 20 feet 9 inches from 19 feet 9 inches. The women's line stayed the same as last year, which is why two lines can be seen on many courts, including Pershing's.

This is the first change in distance since the arc was created prior to the 1986-87 season. The new distance is three inches wider than the international one and three feet shorter than NBA distance.

The new line was created to theoretically create more spacing, which in turn would open up the lane and create more scoring opportunities. It also was supposed to separate the true long-range shooters from the mid-distance ones.

Schrader said the rationale behind the change is flawed.

"If, then, it does actually make it harder to make three-pointers, then you don't have to go out as far because then people aren't shooting," he said. "So then the reverse happens — you can sag off more because people aren't shooting them."

Southwestern Oklahoma University head coach Todd Thurman, whose team is sixth in Div. II in three pointers made per game, said the line change hasn't affected his team offensively or defensively.

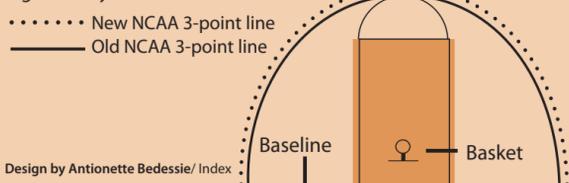
"I don't think it spread out our defenses at all, because again, those who can shoot out there we're going to guard them anyway," Thurman said.

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Taking a step back

The three-point line was moved to 20-ft-9 inches away from the basket this year, a foot deeper than last year's line. The change, however, hasn't affected shooting percentages significantly.

| 3-POINT FIELD GOAL % | 2007-2008 | 2008-2009 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Truman | 33.4% | 32.5% |
| MIAA | 35.5% | 36.7% |
| 3-POINTER'S SHOT/GAME | 2007-2008 | 2008-2009 |
| Truman | 15.0 | 11.8 |
| MIAA | 19.7 | 19.3 |



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