

Men prepared to swing into spring season



File Photo

Senior Scott Danielsen is projected to be one of the Bulldogs' top golfers this spring. Danielsen had an 18-hole average of 74 strokes in eight rounds during the fall.

Bulldogs sit fourth in MIAA standings after fall half of season

BY BLAKE TOPPMAYER
Sports Editor

A veteran's return to the active roster and the MIAA's best sophomore led the men's golf team to a much-improved fall campaign. Now, the Bulldogs look to continue that success during the spring season, which begins with the 54-hole Drury Invite on Monday and Tuesday.

After redshirting in 2007-08, senior Michael Spaulding rejoined the Bulldogs last fall to lead the team with a 72.9 scoring average in eight rounds.

Spaulding joined sophomore Chris Kovach — last season's MIAA Freshman of the Year and an individual super regional qualifier — to spearhead Truman's roster this spring. Kovach had a 73.4 average in eight rounds during the fall portion of the season.

Led by this duo and senior Scott Danielsen, the Bulldogs sit in fourth place in the MIAA as they enter the spring half of the schedule. Coach Jim Berrey said the Bulldogs should have a good chance of qualifying for the NCAA super regionals this spring after missing out on team qualification last year.

"I have very high hopes. I'll put it that way," Berrey said. "I definitely feel like we can compete and be one of the top three teams [in the MIAA]."

Last year, six teams from the MIAA qualified for superregionals. Truman finished seventh at the MIAA championships.

But after last season, the regions were re-aligned, and the Bulldogs now are in a region with more schools from

the south, which has weather conditions favorable for golf almost year-round. Kovach said the new region will make it tougher for MIAA teams to qualify for super regionals this spring. Kovach said that for the Bulldogs to have a good chance to qualify, Truman probably will need to secure a top-three finish in the conference.

That might be possible with Spaulding back in the lineup and Kovach and Danielsen shaving off a few strokes from their 2007-08 averages.

Truman placed fifth or better in five fall tournaments. Each tournament included at least 12 teams. The Bulldogs' top finish came at the Drury Invite near the end of the fall season. Truman placed second in that competition and placed ahead of four of five MIAA opponents.

Spaulding played a key role in the Bulldogs' fall success. His fall 18-hole scoring average was almost 4 1/2 strokes lower than his scoring average his junior season, 2006-07.

"He's mentally tougher," Berrey said of Spaulding's improvement. "When you play golf, bad things happen and it's how you recover from those bad things that determines what your score is. And I think he's been able to show a little bit more mental toughness to go out and recover quickly when something does go awry, and that's made up those strokes."

Spaulding received plenty of support from Kovach, who notched three top-10 finishes in four events last fall. Kovach also dropped a few strokes from his freshman scoring average. Berrey said Kovach's better scores stemmed from putting improvement.

"I think [in the past] he would get into a tournament,

and he would have a stretch of maybe two or three holes where his putter would just leave him and add a stroke or two," Berrey said. "And I think this year he's just got better at hitting his lag putts, his longer putts, a little closer to the hole so it's more of a tap-in rather than a three- or four-foot tester."

Kovach said he's been able to find more consistency on the course this season.

"I'm just kind of getting a better feel out there and can handle the pressure a little better than I used to," he said. "When I used to get under par, I'd kind of get nervous. Now [I realize] you can't really think about it."

Danielsen rounds out Truman's trio of low scorers. He placed in the top 20 three times during the fall after finishing in the top 20 just once during the entire 2007-08 season. Berrey said Danielsen's improvement has been instrumental to the team this year.

"Scott really came on and has had a good senior season there in the fall," Berrey said. "He shaved a couple strokes off, and he's really one of the big reasons that we were up vying for one, two, three rather than in that six, seven, eight range."

Sophomores Vincent Kurth and Andy Herington and freshman Nik Bentzinger are among the Bulldogs competing for the two remaining spots in Truman's top five.

The upcoming Drury Invite is not an MIAA scoring event. Truman's first conference scoring event is at the April 12 to 14 Washburn Invite.

"If we continue playing the way we did in the fall, I don't see why we can't go to the super regionals or even beyond that," Spaulding said.

Athlete of the Week

Michael Staihr

Sport: Baseball
Year: Sophomore
Hometown: Norwalk, Iowa

Sophomore Michael Staihr pitched a one-hit complete game in just his second career start to earn a 2-1 victory Saturday against Southwest Baptist. Staihr recorded two strikeouts and nine ground ball outs. Staihr, who normally pitches in relief, has a 1.96 ERA in eight appearances this season.

Staihr deals one-hitter in 2-1 victory

BY ARRON HUSTEAD
Staff Reporter

Baseball head coach Dan Davis requested four or five solid innings from his starting pitcher last Saturday, and he got that and much more.

Sophomore right-handed pitcher Michael Staihr delivered a complete-game one-hitter against Southwest Baptist University in the first game of a double-header to lift the Bulldogs to a 2-1 victory.

Staihr took a perfect game into the seventh inning and was one strike away from completing it when he gave up a home run on an 0-2 count to Bearcats' center fielder Kyle Wise.

"He was their best hitter, and I did OK up to the last [at-bat], and he took advantage of a bad pitch and put it over the wall," Staihr said.

Following the home run, the Bearcats got a runner on base when third baseman Justin Barnhart reached on an error by Bulldogs' freshman shortstop Steven Rose. This brought the go-ahead run to the plate. Staihr then stepped up in the clutch and struck out first baseman Justin Crumple to end the game.

Staihr kept his pitch count very low — he only needed 74 pitches. He said he mostly was able to do so by pitching to contact. He only recorded two strikeouts in the game and had zero walks.

"I knew they were going to put the ball in play," Staihr said. "So I just tried to let them do that and let my defense take care of that, and they did."

Solid defensive play contributed to Staihr's efforts. The Bulldogs

committed just one error in the field, and junior right-fielder Keaton Jones saved the perfect game with a diving catch in the fifth inning.

This was Staihr's first start of the season. He has appeared in seven games out of the bullpen. Entering the weekend, Staihr had a 2.25 earned run average in 16 innings pitched. He had only made one career start for the Bulldogs prior to Saturday.

Staihr said he had to change his mind set for this start because if he were to throw at his usual pace, he wouldn't have been able to go as deep into the game.

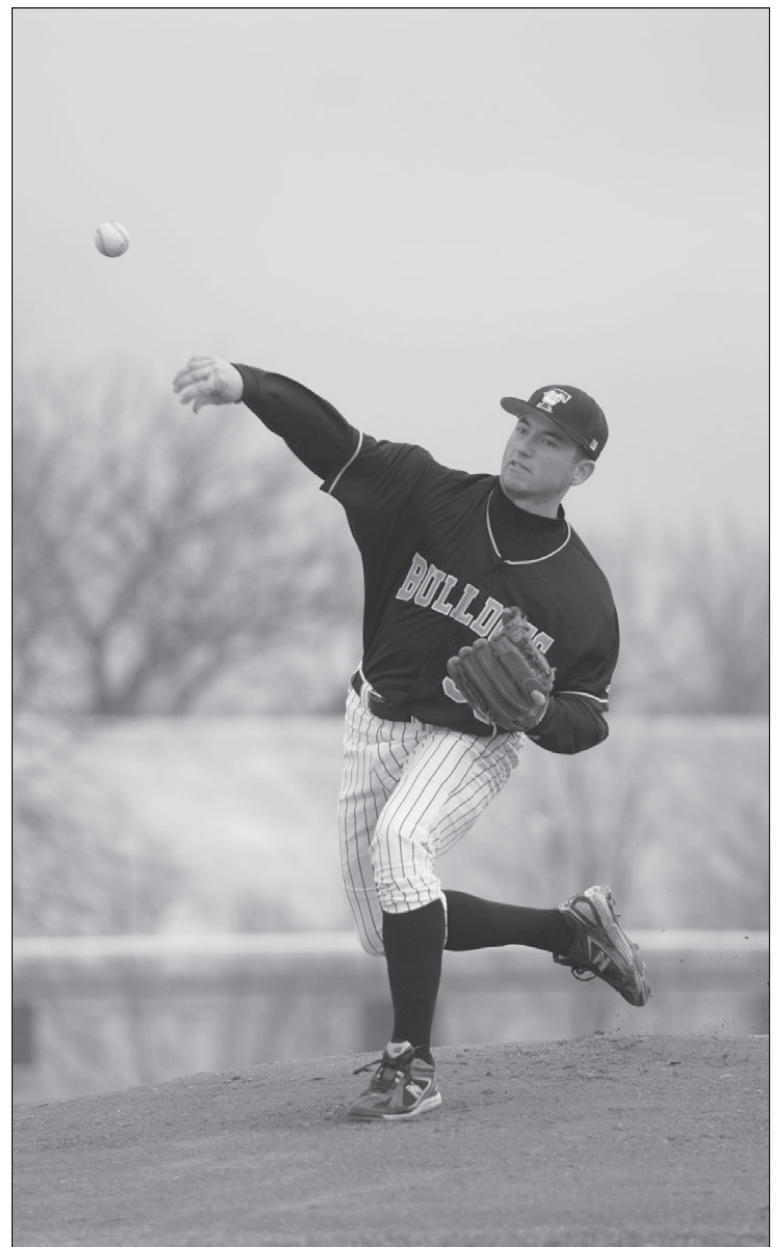
"I knew I'd kind of have to change my approach a little bit," Staihr said. "When I went in as a reliever, I was looking to use whatever I got. I didn't have to worry about setting a pace. I could try to throw my best stuff all the time. As a starter, I tried to set a pace and limit my pitch count."

Before this start, Staihr primarily had been used for middle-inning relief in close games. However, Staihr was asked to start after some members of the starting rotation suffered injuries.

"He's just a kid that we know is a tough guy that can come in and throw strikes and throw normally three pitches for a strike," Davis said. "He just battles really well. We needed somebody to start the game on Saturday, and he stepped up. He was the first guy in line."

One-hit outings usually are few and far between, and Davis said he simply was glad to take part in it.

"I just appreciate being a part of something that was that special," Davis said. "It was really fun to watch."



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Sophomore pitcher Michael Staihr, shown here in practice, pitched a one-hitter Saturday. Staihr was one strike away from a perfect game.

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