

MEN | Team ranked last in preseason coaches poll, six home games to start season could give 'Dogs momentum

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The Bulldogs come into the season ranked last in the preseason coaches' poll with only 16 votes after finishing 4-14 in the conference last year. The MIAA is one of the toughest conferences in the nation, but Estridge said the bottom of the conference is not far behind the top.

The team will play five non-conference games in a row at home before hosting their conference opener against Missouri Southern University on Dec. 3.

"Hopefully we can get people in the gym. They can be like the sixth player," Filchev said. "That's going to be a good chance to start the season and go into the MIAA with confidence."

Men's Basketball Key Returners		
Player	Points per game	Statistics
Banks, Estridge	12.3	3.6 assists
Fandja, Patrick	8	7.9 rebounds
Freeman, Ethan	7.4	5.9 rebounds
Henderson, Alex	5.9	.462 three-point%
Landau, Gabe	3.1	1.6 rebounds
Misiewicz, Mark	3.9	1.9 rebounds

"Normally, it doesn't bother me," Schrader said. "... But I think it did bother me a little more this time because it showed a little bit of lack of respect for the players."

Although Schrader said it is hard to figure out where the teams will place before he sees what players they have, he had a slightly different response to the ranking.

ADVERSITY | Columnist gives top five things women must do for successful run to conference tournament

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goal, the team needs to accomplish one of Smith's goals for the season: get back to the MIAA Tournament. The women just need to be one of the top eight teams in an 11-team league.

Can the women do it? In the words of President-elect Barack Obama, Yes, they can. It won't be easy, but if the team does five things well, they should be heading to Kansas City, Mo., this March for MIAA tournament action.

1. Feed Georgia the ball. Senior forward Georgia Mueller is not only the best player on her team, she is arguably the best player in the MIAA — a freakishly deep conference brimming with talent.

For the Bulldogs to have any chance of being in the top-eight, Mueller has to get her points. On a nightly basis she will be dealing with double- and triple-teams. If the opposition shuts Mueller down, the team will struggle. Which leads to No. 2.

2. Develop a second scoring option. Right now the team is Georgia and a cast of unknowns. Thanks to former head coach John Sloop's reliance on Mueller and last year's four seniors for the past two seasons, the rest of the team is severely lacking in minutes played.

Someone in this group has to step up and establish themselves as a legitimate scoring threat. Opposing coaches are going to make someone other than Mueller beat them because Mueller can't do it alone.

3. Stop turning the ball over. Under Sloop, the women ran an up-tempo offense that was built around getting quick transition points.

The offense was high-reward and high-risk. The team turned the ball over a whop-

ping 18.52 times a game. In the stacked MIAA, the Bulldogs will get torched if they turn the ball over that much this season. They simply do not have the overwhelming talent required to cover up that many mistakes.

4. Find a point guard, or better, find two. Last season then-senior Julia Montebello ran the offense. She is gone. Now, the Bulldogs are lacking in the most important position on the floor. Smith said that right now junior guard Julie Guinn will run the point, but he said point guard is not her natural position.

On the roster, it is no one's natural position. For some reason the team doesn't have a single player comfortable playing point guard — the quarterback of the offense. If the Bulldogs want to even win a game, Guinn will have to grow into the position and one of the other guards will have to develop into a backup roll. Guinn can't play 40 minutes a night for five months.

5. Develop a bench. Right now, Smith only has two spots in his starting five marked in—Mueller and Guinn. It's open season for playing time. This is a golden opportunity for the other members of the team to step up in practice and shine during games.

Last year's squad had four players log more than 30 minutes a game. As the season wore on, the team looked visibly tired at the end of games. They simply ran out of gas. Smith doesn't want that to happen this year. When given the chance to play, this team's players need to make it count. If the Bulldogs don't have a bench, they won't have a shot.

The women will stumble this season. They will lose games. However, if the team does those five things, the women can make it back to the MIAA Tournament.

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DEFY | Men return four starters and top three bench players from team that finished 5-22 last season and is ranked last in MIAA poll

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forwards Ethan Freeman and Mark Misiewicz and sophomore guards Alex Henderson and Stefan Garrison — are more seasoned and should join Estridge and fellow senior forward Patrick Fandja in helping Truman become a threat in the MIAA.

The Bulldogs also benefit from playing 15 of their 27 regular season games at home, including five of seven non-conference games.

Plus, the Bulldogs have a wildcard element on this year's team — three transfers. Sophomores Brandon Griffin and Brian Nwelue, both of whom transferred from junior colleges, should provide some explosiveness for Truman whether they start or come off the bench. The duo attended Class 5A Lewisville High School (Texas) and each averaged a double-double per game in his senior season before the two attended separate community colleges for a year.

"Brian and Brandon are just both very athletic players, which is very important for our conference because you know how athletic our conference can be," Estridge said. "Once they start into our system completely, I think that they'll be very good players."

For an idea of the kind of improvement the Bulldogs could display this season, look no further than Truman's Nov. 1 exhibition game against Div. I Drake University (Iowa).

Truman trailed Drake on the road by just four points with 11:30 minutes to play in the second half.

"They weren't intimidated at all by our guys," Drake assistant coach Mike Gibson said. "Most of the game, they were the aggressors, truthfully."

Drake, which won 28 games and advanced to the Div. I NCAA Tournament last season, eventually put the Bulldogs away and won by 16 points. But it wasn't the blow-out that could have been expected against Drake, a team picked to finish fourth in the Missouri Valley Conference — arguably Div. I's top mid-major conference.

And Drake wasn't playing its garbage players in the exhibition. Drake's Jordan Cox and Josh Young, All Missouri Valley Confer-

ence performers in 2007-08, combined to play 64 minutes.

"I'm not familiar with the other teams in the [MIAA], but I can't imagine them being a last-place team in a Div. II conference," Gibson said.

Now, don't expect Truman to conduct a performance reminiscent of the 2005-06 season, when the Bulldogs qualified for the NCAA Tournament a year after they lost 18 games in 2004-05. A turnaround that grand is hard to fathom. But it's not inconceivable that the Bulldogs will qualify for the conference tournament by finishing in the top eight of the MIAA standings.

"Getting a last-place ranking in the MIAA isn't the end of the world," Estridge said. "It means we're floating under some radars so we can go in there and beat some people."

Do that enough and eventually Truman will find its way on to the radar and into the conference's upper echelon.

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Mike Gibson
Drake Assistant Coach

WOMEN | Team still looking for beyond-the-arc threat

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sophomore forward Malorie Kiecker likely will start. Both Kiecker and Joya averaged just more than five points per game last season in limited roles off the bench. The team still is looking for someone to step up at the third guard position.

Smith said he still is looking for a three-point threat. Candace McGee filled this role the last several seasons, but she was one of the four seniors to graduate after the 2007-08 season.

"We've got to develop some shooters at the same time," Smith said. "That freed up Georgia a lot. We haven't developed that yet. Defensively, again, teams are still packing it down on us a little bit."

Joya said the team is going to use its motion offense as a way to try to get other players besides Mueller involved.

"Basically with our new offense it kind of takes pressure off Georgia so people are actually moving and we'll have more opportunities for other people to score, besides just relying on Georgia to score inside," Joya said.

The Bulldogs hope to get a boost in December when senior Eli Medina finishes her career with the volleyball team and joins the basketball team. Even though Medina hasn't

played competitive basketball since starting in high school, Smith said he is excited for what she can bring to the team.

"I really hope that Eli can bring leadership, that competitiveness," Smith said. "I think that she can probably be our best defensive player on the floor. That's what I hope with her quickness and athleticism. I hope to be able to put her on the other team's best offensive player."

The team has changed with Smith taking over the program this season following the resignation of former head coach John Sloop, Mueller said.

"It's a completely different program this season," Mueller said. "Just the strategies and the way things are approached. There will be a lot of new faces out there because we did lose so many seniors. But it will be for the best I think."

Smith said in the end it all comes down to getting on the floor and playing the game.

"I use this saying every day to the girls: We've got to crawl before we can walk," Smith said. "That's not saying anything bad about them. It's just a matter of we're all trying to figure each other out. It's a new program, it's a new start, new players. Except for Georgia it's all new players."



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