

Pohren's goal lifts women to win

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

Two teams were pitted against one another in a game of survival Sunday. The loser went home, and the winner got a shot at glory.

Truman's women's soccer team and Washburn University were playing what would be the last game of the season for one of the two teams. Eleven minutes into the game, the score was 0-0. Shots from both teams had so far failed to find their mark.

Then the Truman offense struck.

Freshman midfielder Megan Buri crossed a ball to the near post on the left side of the goal. Junior forward Riley Mahn then sailed the ball backward off her head, right to senior midfielder Brigitte Pohren. The only thing that separated Pohren from the goal was a lone defender and the goalie. Following Mahn's lead, Pohren knocked the ball with her head into the net for the only goal of the game.

There were some close calls, but the double-header goal was all the Bulldogs needed to send Washburn to the locker room for the last time this season.

Truman prevailed 1-0 to advance to today's regional final against Texas A&M University-Commerce.

"It was a really tough game," Buri said. "We knew coming into it that, even though we had beaten Washburn twice, it was still going to be a tough match. They knew it was going to be a tough match, too, but they weren't going to just give us the game. ... The possession changed frequently. I didn't think it was a decisive ball control game. ... We just ended up with the result."

Sunday's game marked the third time this season that Truman beat the Lady Blues. This game came after Washburn triumphed over West Texas A&M University in the first round of the playoffs. Due to Truman's No. 2 in the tournament the 'Dogs earned a bye to the second round.

Sunday's weather in Texas differed from the cold, wet weather in Kirksville. The dry, warmer weather combined with the tough Bermuda grass that covered the field contributed to a playing surface that played in between an AstroTurf field and a regular grass field. Head coach Mike Cannon had said that if the teams played on a grass field, the advantage would go to the Bulldogs. If the field was covered in turf, however, the advantage would go to the opponent. He said that because the field conditions were different from either playing surface, neither team had an advantage.

The game never was controlled by one team. Possession of the ball changed frequently, and both teams threatened to break the game open at different points. But both defenses played tight enough to keep that from happening. The Pohren goal was the difference maker in the game, allowing the Bulldogs to focus more on defense, rather than having to focus on

all-out offense, which Cannon said would leave them more vulnerable to fatal errors.

"When you get to that [late] time of the season, late mistakes are obviously, if they happen, [they can be] fatal mistakes as far as leading to goals, that can be your season," Cannon said. "So, I think sometimes kids ... are a little more hesitant to get forward. Especially when you've got the lead."

Senior defender Kim Wolff said Washburn had control of the ball more than the Bulldogs would have desired.

"We were still fighting to score," Wolff said. "But the second half, Washburn really came out strong and they had it in our half a little bit more than I would have liked it to be."

Truman limited Washburn to two shots on goal, and the 'Dogs were limited to four shots on goal. Freshman goalie Jayne Grisham, in just her second start of the season, picked up the shutout.

The real danger the Bulldogs



Photo Submitted
Brigitte Pohren scored a goal in the 11th minute Sunday.

allowed was on kicks. They allowed the Lady Blues five corner kicks and several free kicks. Many of those kicks took place late in the game. Washburn was allowed the possibility of tying the score with a corner kick in

the last 30 seconds of regulation. But, Washburn proceeded to foul a Truman player, for which Truman was rewarded with a free kick. All Truman had to do was knock the ball up field and the game was over.

SOCCER | 'Dogs have a disadvantage statistically

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of four goals or more, including several 6-0 wins and a 9-0 win. Truman, on the other hand, has scored 17 goals at home.

Truman's numbers look a little pale in comparison to Commerce's. Truman has scored less than two goals per game this season (1.95) and allowed less than one per game (0.81) on average. The 'Dogs leading scorers, junior forwards Jessica Wiegert, Katie Reuck and Riley Mahn have scored 10, nine and eight goals on the season, respectively. The next leading scorer after them is Buri, with two goals on the season. The most goals they scored in a game was seven and the most they gave up was two.

Texas has scored 2.4 goals per game this season and has allowed only about a half a goal per game (0.64) on average. Their top scorers this season

scored 20, 10, and seven goals for the season, with three other members of the team having at least three goals scored. The most goals they scored in a game was nine, and the most they gave up in a game was four.

"It's going to be really tough," senior defender Kim Wolff said. "I don't know a ton about the team, but we play the game like it's the last game of the season. For one of the teams, it's going to be over with after this game. No matter what kind of team they are, it's going to be a tough battle."

If the Bulldogs beat A&M-Commerce today, Truman will play the winner of the West Region Championship, which Truman also is hosting. The two teams vying for the West championship are Western Washington University and Seattle Pacific University. The winners of the two regions will play 1 p.m. Saturday.

"It's going to be a tough battle."

Kim Wolff
Senior Defender

WIN | Win on Senior Day ends regular season for Bulldogs, who finish second in the conference standings and earn No. 2 seed in NCAA regional tournament

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6-4. Mo West also hit in the negatives during the first and second set, before hitting .167 in set three.

Senior libero Whitney Boehler and senior outside hitter Eli Medina each finished with 10 digs.

The win secured a second-place finish in the conference for the Bulldogs. Emporia State University won the conference, finishing 32-3 overall and 18-2 in the conference including two victories against Truman. Emporia beat the Bulldogs 3-1 Sept. 17 in Emporia and 3-2 Oct. 22 in Kirksville.

The 'Dogs played one of their most complete matches of the season Friday night and swept Northwest Missouri State University.

The Bulldogs used a balanced attack as the team finished the match with a season-high .433 hitting percentage, which actually was its lowest hitting percentage of the entire night. Truman was hitting well

above .500 after the first two sets, but it dropped after hitting .250 in the third set.

Not only was the offense solid, the defense also shone. Truman held Northwest to a .047 hitting percentage, outhitting the Bearcats by nearly .400. It was the eighth match in a row Truman has held its opponent under .200 and the 29th time this season. It was also the 15th time they have held a team to below .100.

No Truman player finished with double-digit kills, but six Bulldogs finished with at least six kills. Senior right side hitter Melissa Keck finished with nine kills. Senior right side hitter Dana Hanselmann finished with eight kills in 11 attempts, hitting a blistering .727 in the match.

Skoch said the team had been working all week in practice to simulate the upcoming regional tournament, and he cited that as part of the team's complete performance. "This week was our test week

for regionals," Skoch said. "To me it's more about their mindset now. I think the reason we came out firing in game one and two was we were more focused for regionals."

Cherven said the team's effort against Northwest is what the Bulldogs have needed all season.

"That's how we need to play every time we step on the court," Cherven said. "When we play like that, we are unstoppable. When everybody is contributing and playing their best, playing their hearts out, we are going to be able to do great things."

Cherven became the 13th Bulldog to reach 1,000 kills in her career with her third kill early in the match. She joins fellow bulldogs Medina and Keck as the other active Bulldogs with 1,000 kills for their careers. Cherven reached the mark in just three seasons after transferring to Truman from Div. 1 Pittsburgh University prior to her sophomore season.

COLUMN | Eight-match win streak, including wins against three teams in regional, shows that volleyball has found some consistency

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This isn't the same Truman team that started the season with a 21-7 record, which included seven losses in Truman's first 11 matches against ranked opponents.

Skoch has tweaked the lineup, and the Bulldogs have responded to the adjustments. After senior Lisa Weber, who has played middle blocker for most of her three seasons at Truman, became mired in an offensive slump throughout most of October, Skoch shifted Weber to right side hitter in an effort to boost Truman's defense at the position and take some pressure off of her offensively.

Not only has Weber helped limit opponents to a .111 hitting percentage during Truman's win streak, the senior also has heated up offensively. Playing primarily at her new right side position, Weber is hitting .391 in the last four matches.

"It's definitely helped the team," Weber said of the position switch. "I've been able to help with the block. ... It's not what I'm used to, but I've just adjusted and done it to help the team the best I can."

Skoch said the right side hitter position's primary defensive responsibility is shutting down hitting lanes for opponents' outside

hitters. With Weber's background as a middle blocker, Skoch said Weber can apply the defensive pressure necessary to slow down the opponents' outsiders.

This definitely will be helpful if Truman faces Emporia or Washburn in regional play. Emporia's top offensive player is outside hitter Arica Shepard, who leads the conference by averaging 3.74 kills per set and hits .253. Shepard tallied 39 total kills in Emporia's two regular season matchups with Truman.

Washburn also has an exceptional outside hitter in Monica Miesner, who hit .278 this season.

With Weber now splitting time with senior Melissa Keck at the right side hitter position, junior Lauren Graybeal, who formerly started at right side hitter, is free to fill more of a utility position. Since Weber's position change, Graybeal provided a lift at the outside hitter spot in Truman's Nov. 1 win against Pittsburg State University. In that match, Graybeal led the team with 14 kills and a .560 hitting percentage.

Graybeal — who Skoch said has an offensive advantage over Weber, while Weber has the defensive edge — also can shift back

to her right side hitter spot in the Tournament if Weber struggles at that position.

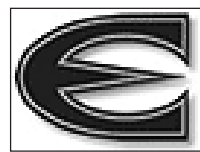
"I didn't have the options at the beginning of the year, and now we have options," Skoch said.

The Bulldogs definitely have endured rough stretches this season, but with increased depth because of Skoch's moves and a senior-laden lineup, Truman still must be considered a top force in the South Central Regional.

"Seniors find a way of getting it done," Skoch said.

It's not too late for the Bulldogs to prove that this weekend.

Team Breakdown



Hitting %: .254
Opp. Hit. %: .140
Digs/Set: 16.9
Blocks/Set: 2.4
Key Players:
Ting Lui:
12.2 Ass./Set
Arica Shepard:
3.74 K/Set, .253



Hitting %: .258
Opp. Hit. %: .141
Digs/Set: 17.3
Blocks/Set: 2.4
Key Players:
Allie Cherven:
1.16 B/Set, .321
Melissa Keck:
2.48 K/Set, .332



Hitting %: .251
Opp. Hit. %: .114
Digs/Set: 17.9
Blocks/Set: 2.1
Key Players:
Monica Miesner:
3.04 K/Set, .278
Mollie Lacy:
2.72 K/Set, .343



Hitting %: .266
Opp. Hit. %: .164
Digs/Set: 17.2
Blocks/Set: 1.9
Key Players:
Linda Igbiniogbe:
1.14 B/Set, .374
Sammie Williams:
3.56 K/Set, .268



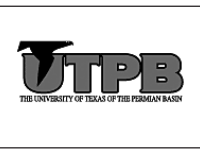
Hitting %: .264
Opp. Hit. %: .120
Digs/Set: 15.9
Blocks/Set: 2.0
Key Players:
Laura Prinsen:
3.93 K/Set, .317
Melissa Harper:
2.89 K/Set, .346



Hitting %: .239
Opp. Hit. %: .172
Digs/Set: 17.7
Blocks/Set: 1.7
Key Players:
Paula Harris:
3.36 K/Set, .291
Jacquelyn Williams:
2.21 K/Set, .337



Hitting %: .205
Opp. Hit. %: .160
Digs/Set: 18.4
Blocks/Set: 2.1
Key Players:
Kayla Jansen:
4.82 Dig/Set
Ellen Thommes:
3.07 K/Set, .359



Hitting %: .177
Opp. Hit. %: .157
Digs/Set: 17.6
Blocks/Set: 1.8
Key Players:
Krystal Polk:
2.23 K/Set, .256
Amithy Henry:
3.55 K/Set, .179

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2008 South Central Regional

Opening Round Games



No. 6 Central Missouri
(28-9)

at 12:00 p.m.



No. 3 Washburn
(30-5)



No. 7 Nebraska-Omaha
(16-15)

at 2:30 p.m.



No. 2 Truman
(29-7)



No. 5 West Texas A&M
(33-4)

at 5:00 p.m.



No. 4 Pittsburg State
(28-7)



No. 8 University of Texas of the Permian Basin
(21-13)

at 7:30 p.m.



No. 1 Emporia State
(32-3)

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TOURNAMENT | Truman knocked Emporia State out of Tournament last season.

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have tried to find a second setter to complement sophomore setter Ashley Petak. Junior Krysta Tholen and freshman Kylie Easlon continue to split time at the position. Each has played 28 matches this season, although Easlon has been the primary No. 2 of late. The team lost the most regular season matches since 2002 this season and the most conference matches since 1998.

"We definitely had some bumps where we lost games that we feel we should have won," senior right side hitter Lisa Weber said. "But I think it helped show us how hard we need to work all the time. And the fact that it happened early in the season, we've been able to work through all the problems and now I think we've kind of peaked at the right time. We've learned to play strong every single match, and I think we're in a good position now going into regionals and the national tournament."

Head coach Jason Skoch said one thing that shines about this senior class is the players' unselfishness and willingness to put the team ahead of personal interests. He said senior Dana Hanselmann switching from middle blocker to outside hitter before this season is a prime example of the character the senior class shows.

"A girl with a whole new skill set, [Hanselmann] is playing at such a high level and she had to learn it in season, compared to other players that have played it their whole career," Skoch said.

"Part of it is she wanted it, but another thing is, this is it."

The Bulldog seniors will be looking for some redemption this postseason by trying to put their last three NCAA Tournament appearances behind them. After reaching the quarterfinals in 2005, the Bulldogs were upset in the 2006 regional semifinals by the University of North Alabama and the 2007 regional finals by Washburn University.

But for the first time since 2005, the 'Dogs will play the tournament away from Pershing. The past two seasons Truman was the top seed in the region and hosted the regional tournament.

Senior middle blocker Allie Cherven said not hosting the regional tournament is fine for her.

"I think it's an advantage," Cherven said. "I think this year all the seniors agree that we won't be going to classes and we'll be able to focus on whatever game we're playing that day. It's better that way because we won't have all the other distractions going on around us like school work and stuff like that."

The Bulldogs are 2-0 against the Mavericks this season. Truman swept UNO at home Oct. 11 and won 3-2 Nov. 8 in Omaha. The 'Dogs rallied from an early 1-0 deficit and held off a late Omaha rally in the Nov. 8 victory.

At 16-15, UNO barely qualified for

the final at large spot in the region, but Skoch was quick to point out that UNO has played better in the last month, including wins against tournament teams Pittsburg State University and Washburn University. The Mavericks also enter the tournament having won six of their last nine matches. They are in the tournament for the fifth consecutive season.

Medina said this team is not taking anything or any team for granted. She said the past two seasons they may have looked past some opponents, and it wound up costing them.

"It doesn't really matter who we play, it's going to be a tough game," Medina said. "So I'm kind of taking it one game at a time. I think in previous years we've maybe gotten a little ahead of ourselves, which ended up hurting us in the end."

Truman has a little bit of history on their side. The Bulldogs are 9-1 all-time in opening-round games of the tournament. Their lone loss came in 1994 to the University of Central Missouri.

But history and records aside, Skoch said it is up to the players now, particularly the seniors.

"The biggest thing about this group is they take control of their own destiny," Skoch said. "And I wish if all of our athletes did that, we'd see some special stuff all season."

"The biggest thing about this group is they take control of their own destiny."

Jason Skoch
Head Coach