

'Dogs pick up win, tie

Women's soccer now a near-lock for NCAA Tournament

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

It is a good time to be a Bulldog soccer player.

The women's soccer team fought to a tie against the No. 5 University of Central Missouri 2-2 on Saturday. The Bulldogs also bagged a 2-0 win in their game against Washburn University last Thursday. These games brought the Bulldogs record to 14-3-2 — good enough for second place in the MIAA.

This weekend was about more than winning games, though it probably gave the Bulldogs the playoff berth they have been fighting for all season. In the NCAA regional poll released last week, the Bulldogs were ranked as the No. 2 team in the region, behind No. 5 UCM. This week Truman climbed back into the national rankings for the first time since the Oct. 14 NSCAA poll. Truman is now ranked No. 23 in the nation. One more win will also clinch second place in the MIAA for the Bulldogs.

"If we take care of business [today] against Emporia, we should be in that top six [in the region]," head coach Mike Cannon said.

The top six teams from the South Central Region qualify for the NCAA tournament.

This comes as great news to the team's seniors.

"I think [getting into the NCAA Tournament] is a goal we always have to charge for," senior defender Kim Wolff said. "All four years I've been here, that's the thing we've wanted to do, is make it to the tournament. ... It's huge. I want to go as far as we possibly can and end on a great note."

UCM came into Sunday's game riding a 13-game win

streak before the tie with Truman.

The Jennies took an early lead in the match, when they scored a goal off of a free kick in the first minute of the game.

The score remained knotted until the 67th minute, when junior forward Riley Mahn scored her eighth goal of the season. That goal tied her for second on the team in goals scored.

"We were awarded a free kick just outside the 18 [yard box]," Mahn said. "... I just hit along the wall on the left side of the goal. I don't think the keeper was expecting a left-footed shot, so it worked out well."

In the 79th minute, Truman gained the upper hand on UCM, when senior midfielder Katelyn Talcott put her first goal of the season into the net.

The lead was short-lived, however, as the Jennies retaliated with a goal a little more than four and half minutes later. Neither team broke the deadlock in two overtime periods.

What the score line does not show is that Truman out-shot UCM 22-12. The UCM defense has limited their opponents to just under eight shots per game, on average. Truman put nine of its 22 shots on goal, compared to the four shots on goal for UCM.

Last Thursday, the Bulldogs shut out Washburn University, 2-0. Six minutes into the game, junior forward Jessica Wiegert notched her eighth goal of the season. Both sides went scoreless until the 65th minute, when Wiegert scored her second goal of the game off a breakaway. That goal buried Washburn deep enough that they were unable to recover.

The Bulldogs play their last game of the regular season today at home against Emporia State University at 2 p.m. Emporia is 4-13-1 this season.



Senior midfielder Katelyn Talcott draws back to fire a shot during Saturday's game against Central Missouri. The shot went in to give Truman a 2-1 lead. UCM scored later to earn a tie. Entering today's game, Truman has a 14-3-2 record.

MIAA Standings		
Team	Overall	Conference
1. Central Missouri	15-0-1	13-0-1
2. Truman	14-3-2	10-3-2
3. Nebraska-Omaha	11-5-0	9-5-0
4. Southwest Baptist	9-4-3	8-4-2
5. Washburn	12-6-2	8-5-1
6. Northwest Missouri	8-8-2	4-8-2
7. Missouri Southern	5-11-1	3-10-1
8. Emporia State	4-13-1	2-11-1
9. Missouri Western	2-14-3	1-12-2



Junior forward Riley Mahn scored her eighth goal of the season Saturday against Central Missouri.

Women have all the pieces for playoff run

Last week posed a pair of make-or-break games for the women's soccer team.

Lose to both Washburn University and the University of Central Missouri, and the women would have faced the possibility of missing the NCAA Tournament.

Lose to one of the two and run the risk of falling from the South Central Region's top two seeds, which earn a first-round bye in the Tournament.

Or earn a minimum of a win and a draw, which would essentially clinch a Tournament berth and the Region's No. 2 spot, barring a loss today against Southwest Baptist University.

The Bulldogs chose option three. The team blanked Washburn 2-0 on Thursday and tied UCM 2-2 on Saturday. For Truman (14-3-2), the results locked up a second-place finish in the MIAA.

Truman is now a virtual lock for its fifth NCAA Tournament berth in the last seven seasons.

The Bulldogs didn't do anything

out of the ordinary last week. They simply utilized some key strengths:

Coaching: It's little mystery why the Bulldogs must be considered as a conference champion contender and NCAA hopeful each season. Head coach Mike Cannon has built a winning tradition for women's soccer.

During the past decade, Cannon has compiled a 151-39-15 record at Truman. The only MIAA head coach who can really challenge Cannon's record of success is University of Nebraska-Omaha's head coach Don Klosterman, who has a 168-38-7 record during that time span.

Cannon's players adhere to his philosophy of ball control and defense, and it leads to wins.

Cannon's coaching paid off for Truman on Saturday. After UCM scored an early goal to take a 1-0 lead, Cannon shifted his team out of its four-back lineup into a more aggressive 3-5-2 — the team's usual formation. The switch led to two goals against a Jennies team that entered the game having allowed just

three goals in MIAA action.

Freshmen production: With good coaching comes good recruiting. Truman graduated three starters from the 2007 team, but several of Cannon's recruits have stepped in nicely to make the 2008 Bulldogs even stronger than they were last year.

Freshmen midfielders Megan Buri and Jaelyn Schumann and freshman defender Amy Schnoes have combined to start 35 games this season. Buri picked up her third assist in Thursday's win against Washburn, and all three contributed key minutes in both games last week.

"We really expected these kids to play this way, but we didn't know it was going to be right away," Cannon said.

Schumann has teamed up with senior Katie Buning in the center midfield to help give Truman the ball possession that Cannon desires out of his midfielders.

"[Schumann's] not that big, but she's probably our next enforcer after Katie Buning as far as midfielders tackling people and winning balls," Cannon said of 5-foot-5 Schumann, who provides a much more physical presence than her size suggests.

Schnoes, who has come off

the bench for most of the season, has helped strengthen the MIAA's second-best scoring defense. She also has earned starts when Truman plays against teams with three forwards and needs an extra back in the lineup.

Defense: Always a trademark of Cannon-led teams, the Bulldogs' defense has been key again this season.

A veteran backline has helped Truman boast a 0.84 goals against average. The Bulldogs notched their seventh shutout in the win against the Lady Blues.

Improved offense: Offense might be the biggest difference between last year's team that finished 15-7-2 and this year's team.

In 2007, no Bulldog scored more than seven goals. This year, the team has three players with at least eight goals. The trio of three juniors — forwards Jessica Wiegert and Riley Mahn and midfielder Katie Reuck — rank in the top seven in the conference in goals per game.

Wiegert leads the way with nine goals and three assists. She scored both goals in the win against Washburn. After a bit of a goal-scoring drop-off in her sophomore season, Cannon said Wiegert is playing with more aggression this season, and

consequently Wiegert — the 2006 MIAA Freshman of the Year — has re-established herself as one of the conference's top forwards.

Wiegert hasn't been without help, however. Mahn already has doubled her goal-production from last season. She picked up her eighth goal of the season Saturday against the Jennies and helped Truman become the first conference team this season to score more than once against UCM.

"I've always thought Riley had a very go-getter attitude," Reuck said. "... She's really stepped up."

As for Reuck, she gives Truman an extra threat from her midfield position.

Overall, this could be the best Truman team since the 2004 Bulldogs totaled 19 wins and advanced to the Regional Finals. In light of the 'Dogs' performances against Washburn and UCM last week, there appears to be little reason why the Bulldogs shouldn't advance at least to the Regional Finals — and maybe further into the Tournament — this season.

"I haven't seen a team this year that I think [we can't beat]," Cannon said. "There's not one team that's head-and-shoulders above us."

COMMENTARY



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