

'Dogs fall at Pitt. State

Truman gives up 35 first half points to ranked team en route to 45-28 loss

BY JACK NICHOLL
Assistant Sports Editor

The football team continued to compete against ranked opponents but was unable to come up with a second big win in a row.

The Bulldogs were defeated 45-28 at No. 14 Pittsburg State University last Saturday afternoon.

The 'Dogs fell behind early and were unable to score until midway through the second quarter when sophomore running back Anton Bernard ran the ball in from 10 yards out, but by then Truman already was down by three touchdowns.

Head coach Shannon Currier said the early deficit caused the Bulldogs to change their strategy.

"Even before the half we were maybe more aggressive and it may be cost us another touchdown, but you're not going to win unless you are aggressive," Currier said. "We were in two-minute mode a lot more than we wanted to be, so we were forced to throw that ball more to get back in the game."

Pitt. State has beaten the Bulldogs 21 times in a row dating back to 1989.

Even after the Bulldogs cut the lead to 14 with Bernard's touchdown, Pitt. State responded with a touchdown on its next possession and another one with less than a minute left in the half for a 35-7 halftime lead. Pitt. State blocked Truman punts on the Bulldogs' first two possessions. Both blocks came after Truman blocking mistakes, and they helped out the Gorilla scoring parade.

But with what is becoming a theme of the season, the Bulldogs did not let the game get away in the second half and outscored Pitt. 21-10.

Truman rushed for a season-high

142 yards on only 23 carries. Senior quarterback Matt Ticich led the way with 44 yards, freshman running back Donald Harvey had 42 and Bernard tacked on 23. True freshman running back Harnish Ayora had 13 yards on five carries in his second game of the season.

Currier said the offensive line got more movement and had more success than earlier in the season. The line, which is first in the MIAA in sacks allowed but last in rushing offense, has an advantage because of their depth.

"We've got close to 10 guys who are really battling and I think that helps," Currier said. "If one guy isn't playing that well, someone else can go in there and at least do it, but there's not a big drop-off right now."

Four offensive linemen have started every game this season and senior Mike Devine, a starter last year, saw time in the Pitt. State game for the first time this season after coming back from an injury.

"[Offensive line] Coach [Marty] Costello is doing a good job with the guys, and a lot of these guys are pretty young," Ticich said. "But I think they're improving pretty much every week and I think we're going to look to run the ball even better this week."

The passing game was also positive. Ticich threw for 235 yards and two touchdowns. Senior wide receiver Phil Kenney led the way with 67 yards receiving, and nine different receivers caught a pass overall.

On the other side of the ball, the defense could not stop the Pitt. State offense, which is averaging 425 yards a game, third in the MIAA. Truman gave up 557 total yards, including 292 yards on the ground. Pitt. State did not punt until its last possession. The Gorillas scored a touchdown on five of their first six possessions and had 298 yards in the first half.

However, the Bulldogs did win the turnover battle for the third straight game with two fumble re-



Sophomore defensive back Luther Eta defends a pass against UNO on Oct. 8. At Pitt., the defense gave up 557 yards of total offense and 298 in the first half. They allowed 5.4 yards a carry and 298 overall on the ground.

Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

coveries, one by freshman defensive back Demetrius Lavant and the other by senior linebacker Eric Sternberg.

"We didn't have the consistency and performance in the other areas but by getting the ball out, we had chances to win the game when we played a first half where the guys are really disappointed in their ex-

ecution in the first half," defensive coordinator Ryan Nourse said.

The loss dropped the Bulldogs out of 10th in the regional rankings, which they had slipped into after their Oct. 8 win against the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Ten teams from each region are ranked, and the top eight go to the playoffs.

The Bulldogs play Washburn University, which took over the 10th spot in the regional rankings, at 2 p.m. this Saturday at Stokes Stadium. When the teams met last year, they combined for 106 points and 1,076 yards of total offense. In the defeat, Ticich threw for a career-high five touchdown passes.

Turnover ratio proves key for football

JACK NICHOLL
Assistant Sports Editor

Defensive coordinator Ryan Nourse is instilling the same philosophy in the Truman defense that made him the NAIA assistant coach of the year in 2007 at Morningside College (Iowa): Force turnovers.

"You don't necessarily have to be the best physical team or the team with the most capabilities, but if you can be really aggressive, and if you can do your job, and if you can take the ball from them — make them make mistakes, you've got a chance to beat anybody," Nourse said.

Truman (3-3, 2-3 MIAA) has 14 takeaways this season, which is fourth in the MIAA. The team has eight interceptions and six fumble recoveries. In their three wins, the 'Dogs have eight takeaways compared to only two turnovers. They have lost the turnover battle twice this season.

It's not just the defense that is doing all the work — the offense has turned the ball over only four times. Altogether, the Bulldogs have a plus-10 turnover ratio, first in the MIAA and tied for eighth in all Div. II.

"We talk about ball security every year," head coach Shannon Currier said. "Our players are doing a good job on the offensive, keeping the ball in tight. Our quarterback, [senior Matt Ticich], is making good decisions — he's not taking a lot of chances."

The turnover ratio helps balance the number of yards the defense has given up. The defense is allowing more than 400 yards per game and is ninth in the conference in the category. The Bulldogs are also ninth in the conference in total offense, but because they rarely turn the ball over, their opponents are not able to get good field position.

The importance of turnover margin cannot be understated. The top 10 teams in the category in Div. II have a combined 53-15 record and five of those ten teams are ranked. The top two teams in turnover ratio, University of North Alabama and Abilene Christian University, are ranked second and third in the nation, respectively, as of the Oct. 7 polls.

Part of the equation is the ability to get pressure on the quarterback, which forces rushed and errant throws. Tru-

man ranks second in the MIAA in sacks per game and is tied for first in sacks given up per game.

For example, on junior cornerback Demetrius Lavant's game-winning interception against University of Nebraska-Omaha on Oct. 8, junior linebacker Eric Sternberg came around the edge to pressure the quarterback.

"That's why we play so much loose zone," Nourse said. "Because eventually, once the pressure starts hitting them, they'll throw you the ball."

On the offensive side, Ticich has thrown just two interceptions in 222 attempts to go with eight touchdowns this season. As well as being quick on his feet to avoid pressure from the defense, he said he would rather throw the ball away than throw into coverage.

"Our running backs are doing a great job with the ball — they aren't turning it over very much," Ticich said. "And I try not to throw into coverage. I try to throw it away more. ... This is my third year in the offense and I know when to take chances and when not to. The line is doing a good job protecting me too which helps."

Last season, Ticich threw for 25 touchdowns but also had 11 interceptions. Overall, the Bulldogs had a negative-three turnover ratio in their 6-5 2007 campaign.

Nourse said he would rather have a team that gets turnovers, even if it might mean giving up a few extra yards. He said the teams he has coached in the past generally have been in the middle of the pack in passing yards, but they have been near the top in passing efficiently. In 2007 at Morningside, Nourse's defense had a school-record 31 interceptions.

"Another thing I talk about is we want to have players who fear no mistake," Nourse said. "Players who don't fear mistakes will go after the ball. They'll stress themselves to get interceptions."

Nourse said the No. 1 thing the Truman defense has to work on is execution.

"I think people saw it at UNO," Nourse said. "We didn't win that game because we were better, we won because we were more opportunistic. We were better that day at getting to the ball. They had good athletes, they are a very good football team, but we took the ball from them."

Turnover Advantage				
	2007		2008 Projected (After six games)	
	TSU	OPP	TSU	OPP
Fumbles gained	9	11	11	3.7
Interceptions gained	14	13	14.7	3.7
Turnover Ratio (NCAA Ranking)	T - 72 -09		T - 8 1.67	

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