

Expectations high for roller hockey

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

Senior goalie John Pecher wants one thing for the roller hockey team this season.

"Hands down, we want to win a national championship this year," Pecher said. "We've had a couple really good runs the past two seasons, with some unfortunate losses before we got deep into the national tournament play. So we're looking to redeem ourselves on the national stage."

After a disappointing loss in the second round of the Div. II playoffs to California State University-San Bernardino last year, the Bulldogs roller hockey team is set to make another run for the playoffs. The squad is hungry for victory, and nothing short of a national title will sate their appetites.

But with the start of any new season, there comes some uncertainty.

"It was an interesting start to the season because we didn't know who we were going to get," head coach Joe Nedelec said. "... You never know with players at Truman who's going to be coming. We don't really have enough time and energy to do a lot of recruiting. Plus, even those who we can recruit, may not meet Truman's standards. Hockey players, as a bunch, are not known for their intellectual capabilities, while I try to crush

that myth as much as possible."

Truman returns with all of the pieces of its playoff team from last year, with the exception of last year's captain, Dane Moody. Although the loss of Moody - who Nedelec said was one of the best players to ever come through Truman - will be felt, Truman brought in enough new talent to hopefully offset it.

With the additions of freshmen defender John Pfannebecker and forward Cody Dependahl to the A team, the Bulldogs have added talent to both ends of the team. Another player, freshman Jessie Levin, has practiced with the team during the last year and will be rotating between the A and B teams at the beginning of the season. The additions help round out the Bulldogs, giving them solid depth from top to bottom.

"John and Cody added to the A team, unbelievable," Nedelec said. "Cody is an incredibly talented hockey player. ... [John] is a fantastic defenseman. He's going to be paired up with [senior defenseman John Dougherty]. The club looks really good. We've got three solid lines, which is kind of rare for us. We've usually been a two-and-half-line team. No disrespect to the guys who have played in the past, but we've never seemed to be able to lock three lines that seemed to click."

The Bulldogs are stacked



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Sophomore forward Zach Rohne readies for a shot during practice this week. Roller hockey will attempt to improve off of their second-round loss in the playoff last season.

with talent on both ends of the roster. Truman can afford to be an all-out offensive team because of the quality of the defense and Pecher guarding the net.

"I would say we are offensively-minded, but we are able to because the strength of our [defense] and our goaltending," Nedelec said. "Nick [Blechle] and Neil Bales will be playing [defense] together. Neil is well known for his shot-blocking ability. Neil will stop more pucks on the ice than a goalie will. It's

uncanny, I've never seen anything like it. Nick's gotten a lot stronger in the last year."

The strength of the defense allows the offense to play all-out and focus on scoring rather than worrying about defense.

"I have so many natural scorers on the team, it would be like forcing Einstein to do psychology," Nedelec said. "We really focus a lot on that blitzkrieg type offense. I skate these guys to the bone. I really try and get their speed going, which really

helps their offense." The team returns its top point scorer from last year in Dougherty, who scored a total of 42 points, and the leading goal scorer in senior captain Drew Vandas, who scored 29 goals last season.

The team has been practicing in the Student Recreation Center preparing for the upcoming season. Nedelec said the team is not in quite the shape he had hoped, but as a team, the talent is a step above last year. Nedelec said the team

looks like it's "playing December hockey in October."

That will be a great thing for the Bulldogs, as their schedule toughens up significantly from last year. This year, the team will play a mixture of teams from Div. I and Div II instead of all Div. II schools.

"It's kind of different this year than it has been in years past because of the [changes in] divisional structures," Vargas said. "We're going to be playing a lot of Div. I teams and a lot of teams within our division that will be difficult."

The team heads into its first weekend playing against the defending Div. I national champions, the Lindenwood University Lions. Truman played the Lions last season and lost the 7-2. The Bulldogs managed to take the lead early in the second period, 2-1. After that Lindenwood ran away with the game and scored six unanswered goals.

The Bulldogs will hit the rink this Saturday in St. Peters, Mo., for their first games of the season. The 'Dogs square off against Illinois State University at 11 a.m. They play Missouri State University at 5 p.m. On Sunday, the Bulldogs take on Lindenwood at 10 a.m.

Drury ends men's soccer's unbeaten streak

BY KRISTA CRIDER
Sports Reporter

The men's soccer team ended its streak this Sunday, falling to Drury University 2-0 in Springfield, Mo.

The 'Dogs hadn't lost in five games and looked as if they were headed for a .500 record, despite beginning the season 3-8. Their hopes were dashed Sunday. With only one game left, Truman has a record of 7-9-1.

Head coach Duke Cochran said the game could have gone either way, but Truman was plagued with bad luck yet again.

"Drury is a very good team," Cochran said. "They've only got five losses, and we had to play them at their place on turf. If you look at the stats, it was a very even game. We just got a little unfortunate."

The teams fired shots back-and-forth for the entire first half before Drury's senior forward Marco Cherisma connected for a goal off a corner kick with five minutes left in the half to give Drury a 1-0 lead.

The second half began with a slew of fouls from both teams and three shots by Truman in the first 15 minutes. None of the shots were successful, however, with one wide, one high and one saved by Drury goalkeeper Logan Hoffman. Both goalkeepers, Drury's Logan Hoffman and Truman's sophomore Kyle Talbot, came out of the game with five saves apiece.

The second goal came from Cherisma again in the 72nd minute to seal the win for Drury. Cherisma was an honorable mention NCAA Div. II All-American last year, and senior midfielder Josh Weir said he was a major

threat for the Bulldogs.

"[Cherisma] was definitely a guy that we targeted before the game," Weir said. "He's a good player, and he's always going to be a threat because he's kind of tough to contain, but our defense did really well on him for the most part."

Sophomore midfielder Dan Meagher said the team's loss was the result of a few key mistakes.

"We played pretty well but not to the level we had been playing," Meagher said. "We didn't come out as strong as we had in the past. They were a pretty good team, but they were playing better than us, and the goals we gave up were the couple mistakes we had, and the chances we had, we didn't put away."

This will be the first time in 15 years that the men's soccer team will have a losing record. Weir said this is not what he wants the graduating

class to be remembered by.

"I'm extremely disappointed [that we had a losing season]," Weir said. "It's kind of a bad way to leave your senior class' legacy, but it's not like we played bad this year. It's obviously disappointing to be known as that team who finally [had the losing season]."

The Bulldogs are nearing the end of the 2008 season, with a final game Sunday against Columbia College. Truman began the season 2-0 and then had a 1-8 slump, but the 'Dogs have come out of it with a turn for the better. Despite the latest loss, Cochran said the team will close the season with class.

"This team coming in, we all had high expectations," Cochran said. "I am really proud of these guys because we were 4-1-1 in our last six games, and they've responded well and fought for it. It's important to finish strong, and

I have been happy with the way they have been playing."

Meagher said the 'Dogs came out of their mid-season slump by reverting back to the way they played at the beginning of the season, which ultimately increased the team's confidence.

"We started [the season] really strong, and then we just kind of hit a spell where we were playing really good teams and not getting results, but after a few games we got on a roll, and we started playing really well getting back to where we were at the beginning of the year," Meagher said. "Once we got back to playing like we were, I think our confidence was a lot higher. We were expecting the ball to go in and to get results in games."

The Bulldogs will play their last game of the season against Columbia at home at 1 p.m.

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