

Men ready for tough teams

Bulldogs move Green forward in search of more goals

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER
Sports Editor

The team is .500, has been shut out in half its games this season and ranks sixth in the 12-team South Central Region, but sophomore forward Matt Kimball said the men's soccer team is primed for a hot streak.

"People need to watch out because we're going to be good," Kimball said. "We're going to make a move. I got a lot of confidence in our team, everybody from the last player on our bench to the person who plays the most minutes."

The Bulldogs enter tomorrow's game against Div. III Washington University with a 3-3 record after suffering losses earlier this month to Lynn University (Fla.) and Tampa University — both currently ranked in the top 12 nationally — and the University of the Incarnate Word (Texas), which is ranked fourth in the South Central Region.

The 'Dogs lost those games by a combined score of 4-0, which shows Truman can compete with even the nation's top teams, Kimball said.

"We've played well, but we haven't played up to our potential," he said. "I think there's another level that we can get to."

For the men to reach that next level, they will need more consistent offensive production. It's been all or nothing this year for the 'Dogs offensively. In Truman's three wins, the Bulldogs have scored 12 goals and fired 52 shots, including 29 shots on goal. The three losses came via the shutout, in which the Bulldogs attempted just 32 shots, with 14 on goal.

In an effort to push more players forward, the team switched from its 4-4-2 formation to a 4-3-3 lineup for the Bulldogs' Sept. 11 game against Tampa.

"When you play with three

forwards and they're drawing [defenders] wide, it can frustrate the other team on how to track them," head coach Duke Cochran said. "I think out of our 4-4-2, we can move to the 4-3-3 very easily."

The biggest switch coming from the formation change will be for Ben Green. Green started the season as the team's left back, but Cochran said the 6-foot-4 junior will now move into an attacking role in the midfield or forward position. Green played forward his freshman season, and he has seven career goals.

"If you've got game changers on your team and they're not changing the game where they're playing, I think as a coach you need to make sure you give them the chance to change the game," Cochran said. "Ben Green has all the talent in the world. Can he realize how to utilize it in the big game when it really, really matters and fight for it? [That] is something I still need to see from him."

Cochran said it could vary by game whether Truman uses a 4-4-2 formation or the 4-3-3, but he said Green will remain in an attacking position regardless of the formation.

By Green taking on a more offensive role, it could help alleviate the loss of sophomore forward Dan Meagher, the team's leading scorer in 2007. Meagher is working to return from a sprained ankle injury and could be ready for Friday's game.

With Green no longer in the backfield, freshman Craig Beil has claimed the left back position and sophomore back Ben Friesen should continue to see playing time in the backfield. The two already have seen a lot of action coming off the bench.

Sophomore goalie Kyle Talbot said losing Green in backfield should not have a detrimental effect on the defensive performance, which has been Truman's strength through six games. No team has scored more than twice against the purple and white this season.

"In terms of defensive abil-



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Junior Ben Green will take on a bigger offensive role as the men's soccer team experiments with a 4-3-3 formation.

ity, I don't think much is going to change in the back," Talbot said. "... Our defenders off the bench were playing so well that they were pushing in and getting a chance at the starting spot. And Ben Green is actually going to go up and be a little more dangerous up top."

The Bulldogs defense will need to remain strong during the next week, as the Bulldogs begin a stretch of four games in eight days, beginning 4 p.m. tomorrow against Washington University, a team that made the Div. III NCAA tournament last season.

The schedule won't get any easier from there. After tomorrow's game, the Bulldogs will play Lewis University (Ill.),

Quincy University (Ill.) and Rockhurst University. All three teams have winning records and rank in the top eight of the Midwest Region.

Dating back to last season, the 'Dogs are 0-6 in their last six games against teams that had a winning record entering the matchup. But Kimball said the Bulldogs are prepared to compete against any opponent, regardless of record.

"Bring any team on," Kimball said. "I think we can play with anybody and we can beat anybody. I'm not worried about what they're ranked, where we're playing at, or how tough our schedule is. I think our team can handle anything. We're ready."

TRUMAN ATHLETICS News and Notes

Swimming: Women receive rings

The 2007 national champion women's swim team received its first-place rings at halftime of the football game Saturday.

Director of Athletics Jerry Wollmering and University President Barbara Dixon distributed the rings. The 14 national qualifying swimmers had their names and hometowns announced and some of the top performances were highlighted.

"It was definitely a privilege and honor to receive the rings at the halftime of the football game, especially in front of that size of a crowd and under the lights," head coach Mark Gole said.

Truman won national titles in two events: junior Kate Aherne in the 200-meter individual medley, and Aherne, junior Kendra Brunkow and alumni Emily Pufall and Molly Polette in the 800-meter freestyle relay. Polette also had three runner-up finishes and a third-place finish.

The top four teams at nationals receive trophies after the meet, but only the national champion is awarded rings, which are given out in the fall.

Laura Harp was the only alumna not in attendance, but she will be in town for alumni weekend this weekend.

Volleyball: Cherven, Keck climb career lists

Two Bulldogs continue to climb up the career kill list. Seniors Allie Cherven and Melissa Keck each are approaching 1,000 career kills. Keck entered Wednesday's match against Pittsburg State with 940. Cherven has 824. Both Cherven and Keck could reach the top 10 in blocks before their careers end.

Brenda Ippenson is currently No. 10 with 1,026 career kills. Keck has been a Bulldog for the last four seasons, and Cherven has been a Bulldog for the last three seasons after transferring from Div. I University of Pittsburgh.

Football: Davis gets playing time as QB

Sophomore backup quarterback Phillip Davis saw time for the second time in three games Saturday against Northwest Missouri State University.

He came in late in the fourth quarter and was 0-for-1 passing with no rush attempts.

Against Southern Arkansas University on Sept. 6, Davis was 3-for-6 passing for 17 yards, but he was sacked twice. He had six rush attempts for 19 yards.

Davis is in his second season as a backup for starting senior quarterback Matt Ticich. Last season he saw time in nine games, passing for 80 yards and a touchdown. He had five completions in 13 attempts.

Men's soccer: Tourney teams limited by region

Because the men's soccer team plays in the South Central Region, it will be even more difficult for the Bulldogs to qualify for the NCAA Tournament.

The 12-team South Central Region only receives two bids to the NCAA Tournament. Other regions, such as the South, get as many as six bids.

The number of bids a region gets is percentage-based on the number of teams in the region. One bid is awarded for every five teams. Therefore, national rankings mean very little when it comes time for NCAA tournament selection. Regional rankings carry the true weight. Truman ranks sixth in the South Central Region.

This is Truman's first season in the South Central Region.

Defense key to volleyball team's success

BY BRENT FOSTER
Staff Reporter

There is an old sports cliché that defense wins games, and early on this season that has held true for the volleyball team.

"When you can't get it done offensively, you have to find some other way," head coach Jason Skoch said. "... Our offensive numbers have been so poor it's almost like the Chicago Bears two years ago in the Super Bowl. The defense can't always do it."

A way the Bulldogs measure their defensive success is by looking at opponents' hitting percentages for matches. Hitting percentage is found by taking the number of kills minus the number of errors and dividing by the number of attempts.

This stat has shown its importance in the Bulldogs' four losses this season. Opposing teams are hitting more than .100 points higher in Bulldog losses than victories this season. The 'Dogs had a season-worst defensive effort, allowing a .317 hitting percentage in the Sept. 13 loss to Southwestern Minnesota State University. Only one time in a loss this season have the Bulldogs out-hit their opponent. That came during the Sept. 5 loss to the University of Nebraska Kearney. Kearney hit .154, but the Bulldogs committed 23 attack errors in the 3-1 loss.

Senior outside hitter Eli Medina said the defense can be just as important to winning matches as the offense.

"The hard part is when our defense isn't there in certain matches, those are the matches we are losing," Medina said. "That just shows how important our defense really is. ... Any team will tell you that you have to have a good defense. That's the base of your team — it starts with that. It also doesn't matter how great your hitters are. We can't set Allie [Cherven] and Melissa [Keck] if the passes aren't there. I definitely think it's a huge part of our game."

As much as the defense has struggled in the losses, it has been that solid in victories. The Bulldogs are holding opponents to a .160 hitting percentage this season, including a match earlier this season against Cadron State University (Neb.) in which the Bulldogs held their opponent to a negative hitting percentage. They held previously unbeaten Washburn University to a hitting percentage of .123 in a 3-2 win Friday. Lady Blue All-American Monica Miesner hit just .102 for the match. Truman held then-No. 6 Grand Valley State University (Mich.) to a hitting percentage of .073 in a sweep Aug. 29.

Skoch said preaching all week to the team about being aggressive on

the offensive and defensive end made a huge impact in the victory against Washburn. He said he saw more players being aggressive instead of passive, which led to fewer mistakes.

"We are going to change our attitude the rest of the year," Skoch said. "It's going to be aggressive nature, and I'm going to be a lot more forgiving if the error comes from being aggressive."

Cherven said the aggressive attitude on defense often carries over to the offense.

"I think we had over 100 digs in the Washburn match," Cherven said. "It fuels the fire. It makes you want to put the ball away when Whitney [Boehler] is diving in the back row for a dig."

One thing helping the Bulldogs hold teams to low hitting percentages is that the Bulldog blockers have been taking care of business up front. The 'Dogs rank third in the MIAA in blocks per set. Senior blockers Allie Cherven and Lisa Weber each rank in the top 10 in the conference in blocks per set. Cherven also ranks 16th in the country in blocks. As a team, the 'Dogs rank 19th.

"We work every single day in practice on blocking," Cherven said. "If you're working hard and closing the block it makes it easier for the defense as well."



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Junior right side hitter Lauren Graybeal goes up for a block against Washburn on Friday. Opponents are hitting .160 against the 'Dogs.

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