



Top: Junior quarterback Phil Davis hands off to freshman running back Scott Stevens during practice Monday.
Bottom: Sophomore RB Anton Bernard performs a drill at practice.

Running backs vie for time

Nesbitt says as many as five backs could see time next season

BY BRENDAN O'BRIEN
Staff Reporter

Despite nearly five months before the opening kickoff to the next football season, competition is fierce for playing time.

The struggle for playing time is perhaps most prevalent at the running back position. After losing their top rusher in senior Vanessa Emokpae, the 'Dogs have big shoes to fill. Emokpae led the team with 524 yards on 97 carries and was also tops on the team with 26 receptions for 365 yards.

The Bulldogs will, however, return their next four leading rushers. Junior quarterback Phil Davis will likely start, but the running back position is up in the air. Head coach Gregg Nesbitt said as few as three and as many as five backs will contend for playing time.

Junior Anton Bernard and sophomores Harnish Ayora and Don Harvey each had more than 40 carries in 2009 and will fight for time next season. But they are not alone.

Redshirt freshmen Tracy Milo and Will Mosquera are poised to make a contribution as well, and Nesbitt said this depth makes the running back position one of the team's strong points.

As for who will start, much is unknown at this point. Bernard said it is ultimately the coaches' decision.

"It's just one of the situations where the coaches are going to put the best players on the field

and have confidence that they'll step up," he said.

Despite this, Harvey, who referred to himself as a "personnel back," said the running back position primarily will be a two-man rotation. Regardless of who fills these spots, Harvey said veteran leadership will be vital to team success.

"We've went through hard times with the team, good times with the team — not too many good times, but we'll know what to expect and know what to see," Harvey said. "Not even just if you're in but if you're helping someone out because you've seen it before."

Bernard said the coaching staff has a lot to do with instilling confidence into a team that went 2-9 in 2009.

"I think [Coach Nesbitt] brought in a lot of passion, and that helps players that might have lost passion for the game over the last couple years," Bernard said. "I definitely think that we're more hungry than we've ever been."

In addition to its own experiences, Harvey said the backfield will benefit immensely from a seasoned offensive line and the new teaching techniques of first-year coach Jed Paulsen.

"He's probably the best offensive line coach I've seen," Harvey said. "It seems like when [the offensive linemen] look up, they know exactly what they did before he can even get to telling them about it and then they try to correct it. It's more of, they demand excellence at their position more so now."

The Bulldogs will face off for the team's annual spring game April

24, but Nesbitt said it will not be their first major evaluation. Coaches have been monitoring players with each practice, especially during Saturday scrimmages.

Nesbitt's goal is to have a balanced attack. He said, however, that he does not necessarily want an equal number of rushes and passes per game, but rather that the two dimensions would be equal threats to the defense.

Last season, the 'Dogs converted 59-of-169 (35) 3rd downs. Ayora, Bernard and Harvey combined for 650 yards on 178 carries.

Nesbitt's offensive philosophies are part of a broader plan with which the 1980 Truman alumnus entered as head coach. Nesbitt said his staff is interested in building not only a great team but a great program, and the running back position is a prime example. The backs are different and will rely on each other for guidance even as they thrive on inter-team competition to adapt to the loss of former stars.

Harvey said he knows the process will not be easy, but the backs, and all players, are driven by each other to work hard.

"Number one, nobody likes to lose," Harvey said. "And then it's just the attitude that coach brought: It's not just [that] you want to win, you've got to work hard to do it. The new coach brought in a different fire and the team's already shaping up and changing to adapt to that fire and they have. It's not just that [the coaches] want to win, they want to be good — better than good — and it's an attitude that they're teaching the team."

4 make move from KHS to TSU

Athletes give myriad of reasons for staying or leaving Kirksville

BY JACK NICHOLL
Sports Editor

Jean Ochs could have played tennis for Truman. She attended head coach Pete Kendall's tennis camps for six years growing up, and Kendall wanted her on the team. Ochs had a chance to possibly play at a Div. I school in Texas, or she could have followed her older sister, Amy, and become a Bulldog.

But Jean Ochs, a four-year standout on the Kirksville High School tennis team, chose otherwise. She will attend Johnson County Community College (Kan.) next fall. Jean Ochs said she was not opposed to Truman, but that she wanted to become more independent. She said she chose Johnson County for the combination of academics and athletics, but she has not ruled out coming to Truman in two years.

"It's not like I didn't like Kirksville at all, because I really like Kirksville, but I just wanted to get out a little bit," Ochs said.

Ochs is not alone in her decision to not attend Truman for varsity athletics despite competing at KHS. This year just four varsity Bulldogs are from Kirksville High — tennis players junior Amy Ochs and freshman Jonathon Gooch, freshman wrestler Colton Schmitz and freshman baseball player Travis Eagen.

Kirksville High School had a graduating class of 191 in 2009, according to the City-Data Web site, and about 20 to 30 graduates attend Truman each year. But few go on to play varsity sports.

Andy Jackson, activities coordinator and baseball coach at KHS, has been coaching at Kirksville for 11 years. He said about 25 baseball players have gone on to play in college, and five of them have attended Truman.

"It has to be the right fit," Jackson said. "Obviously if it's the right fit for the kid, then sure, I encourage my players to go to Truman."

The decision process varies for every athlete. For Amy Ochs, the decision to stay at Truman was based on the financial benefits and the fact that she knew Kendall. Amy also had attended Kendall's summer tennis programs for a few years.

"It's nice to stay in your comfort zone I guess," she said. "I more wanted to leave Kirksville and get out on my own, but it's still nice to stay home. ... It was pretty easy for coach Kendall to recruit me — I don't have to take tours. I already know what I'm getting."

Amy has compiled a 59-19 singles record in nearly three full seasons. She lived at home for her first two seasons but said it did not take away from the overall college experience — she said she has met people through the organizations she is involved in.

Schmitz also has had success as a Bulldog. He was leading the wrestling team

4 OF A KIND

Four current athletes have graduated from KHS

- Amy Ochs: Junior tennis player
- Colton Schmitz: Freshman wrestler
- Jonathon Gooch: Freshman tennis player
- Travis Eagen: Freshman baseball player

in wins before he tore his MCL and missed much of the season and ended with an 18-14 mark.

Schmitz was a two-time state champion at KHS and said he knew he could have success at the Div. II level. Head coach Dave Schutter targeted Schmitz early. Like Amy Ochs, Schmitz liked the price and proximity to home.

"I knew that if I went to Truman it would be easier on me, knowing the town in general," Schmitz said. "And I also got a scholarship from coach Schutter early on. I wanted to have some success, and I thought Div. II would be a good fit for me."

The Truman baseball team

has Eagen, who had a 3.37 ERA in 45.2 innings for KHS in 2009. But although Eagen went to Truman, 2009-senior Cody King signed with the University of Missouri. King had a 1.72 ERA in 40.2 innings. The difference in performance is just another factor in the decision of whether to come to Truman.

"Truman is a very academic school that they have to have the right type of student for, and I think you have to have to right type of kid," Jackson said. "Do they want to stay home, do they want to experience something outside? I think just in general we try to get our coaches to look at what's the best fit for the kid."

TRUMAN ATHLETICS News and Notes

Men's tennis: Lineup changes after injury

The men's tennis team has reshuffled its doubles lineup following a sprained ankle to senior No. 1 doubles player John Rothfusz. Senior Kyle Schlotz is now pairing at No. 1 with senior Peter Bracha, who moved up from No. 2 doubles.

Seniors Steve Hipkiss and Ben Rusk now are forming the No. 2 pairing.

Schlotz and Bracha last played together in the 2007-08 season, when they went 5-2 and advanced to the semifinals in doubles of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association regional tournament.

Schlotz said he is comfortable playing with either Rothfusz or Bracha. He said Rothfusz is more of a power player, whereas Bracha plays a steady, consistent game.

Head coach Pete Kendall said he hopes to have Rothfusz back by the MIAA Tournament, which starts April 24.

Baseball: Several players near top in MIAA

Several Truman players are ranked in the MIAA in statistical categories. Sophomore pitcher Ryan Trimble is seventh in ERA, ninth in opponent batting average and tied for third in innings pitched. Freshman pitcher Jarrett Eiskina is fourth in strikeouts.

Junior second baseman Luke Crader is fourth in walks with 23. Freshman third baseman Jordan Howe is tied for eighth in hit-by-pitches with seven. Junior outfielder Kenny Swanson is tied for fourth in sacrifice bunts with six. Junior first baseman Drew Garwood, sophomore catcher Devon Myers and Howe are all tied for sixth place in sacrifice flies with three.

Track: Dell'Orco wins MIAA award

Sophomore distance runner Dani Dell'Orco received the MIAA Women's Track and Field Athlete of the Week. Dell'Orco took first place in the 10,000-meter run at last week's Jim Duncan Invitational.

Her effort earned her an automatic qualifying time at the Div. II national meet. Her time of 35:23:82 was a personal best and gives her the fifth-fastest time in Div. II. This was nearly three minutes better than her time last season.

Earlier this season Dell'Orco garnered a provisional mark in the 5,000-meter run and is 14th in Div. II in that event.

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