

Men's tennis sweeps Emporia

Women also defeat Hornets in final home match of season

BY BRENT FOSTER
Assistant Sports Editor

Five men's tennis seniors played their final home match Wednesday against Emporia State University.

The seniors made the most of the match and helped deliver a 9-0 victory.

The men got off to a hot start, winning all three doubles matches to place the Hornets into an early hole. The 'Dogs were never tested during the doubles portion, winning all three by at least four.

Senior Kyle Schlotz helped lead the charge with a 6-0, 6-0 victory. The win gave Schlotz 73 career victories, the most among active players.

The Bulldogs could have a tough time replacing the senior class because five have been four-year starters. The six combined for 277 singles wins.

"It's kind of weird," senior Peter Bracha said. "I've dedicated my last pretty much 10 years of my life towards tennis, and this is probably going to be one of my last competitive matches. It's kind of odd. I'm not really sure how I feel about it."

Senior David Sherwood was the only senior not to play. He missed

most of the season with a torn ACL. "It's always hard to replace players that have played that long and done well," head coach Pete Kendall said.

The women didn't get off to the fast start that the men did, but bounced back to win their home finale 5-4.

The duo of junior Kelsey Kuykendall and sophomore Dagmar Velez was the only winner for Truman in doubles. But the team came back strong in singles, winning three of their first four. With two matches left, Truman led 4-3 when freshman No. 5 Lauren Higgins swept her match to give the Bulldogs the victory.

The Senior Day victory for the men came after they split a pair of matches last weekend. The 'Dogs won at the University of Nebraska Omaha 7-2 on Friday and lost 8-1 Saturday against Northwest Missouri State University.

The Bulldogs started well against UNO, sweeping the three doubles matches to put the Mavericks in an early hole.

Kendall said that getting off to a good start in doubles was the key to beating UNO.

"That's a huge positive for us and a huge negative for them," Kendall said. "They're like, 'Oh my goodness we have to win five matches, and they only have to win two.'"

The 'Dogs won four of their six singles matches, with losses coming at

No. 1 and No. 6.

The tougher competition showed against No. 21 Northwest, which defeated the Bulldogs 8-1 Saturday. Seniors Steven Hipkiss and Ben Rusk were the lone winners on the men's side at No. 2 doubles. The Bearcats swept the singles competition 6-0, but two of the matches remained close. Sophomore Eric McCollough dropped his match in a tiebreaker and Schlotz dropped a tough first set, 6-4, before falling 6-2 in the second set.

Schlotz said he struggled with his serve during the loss to Northwest and missed some shots he needed to make.

"I missed a couple easy attacking shots, and it didn't help also against Northwest that my serve was broken four times during my singles match," Schlotz said. "It's tough to get a win if you can't hold your serve."

The women shared a similar fate as the men. They defeated UNO 5-4 before dropping a 6-3 decision to Northwest.

Like the match against Emporia the women trailed 2-1 after doubles but bounced back with four singles victories in straight sets against UNO. Junior Amy Ochs led the charge at No. 1 with a 6-4, 6-1 victory.

The women are scheduled to play Fort Hays State University on Friday in Kansas City, but Kendall said the possibility of rain might



Senior Peter Bracha prepares to return a serve during a match earlier this season. Bracha played his final home match of his career Wednesday.

Jessica Rapp/Index

cancel that match.

Both teams compete at the MIAA Championships on Saturday and Sunday in Kansas City. Neither the men nor women are in contention for an at-large bid and would have to win the tournament to advance to the NCAA

Tournament.

Kendall said he expects one or two other MIAA teams to advance to both the men's and women's side. Those teams are likely to be Northwest and Washburn University on both the men's and women's side.

Effort, formation among changes to defense

Defense last in MIAA against run in 2009 season

BY JACK NICHOLL
Sports Editor

Football head coach Gregg Nesbitt nodded his head and smiled as his defense ran back yet another touchdown during spring practice Monday night.

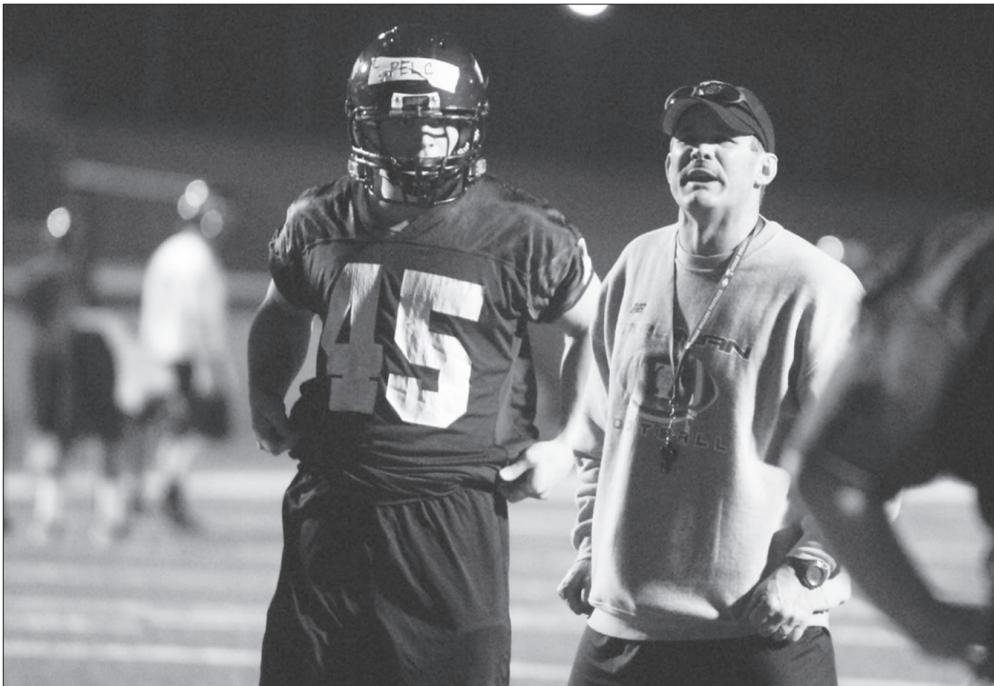
"It's becoming a habit, isn't it?" Nesbitt said to the player who ran the ball into the end zone.

It didn't matter that the play was well-finished or that Nesbitt had momentarily tried to whistle it dead. The defensive players had done just what Nesbitt ordered — give extra effort after every play.

Nesbitt said that, as elementary as it sounds, playing harder is the key to improving a defense that ranked seventh in the conference in total yards last season. The team did fine against the pass — first in the MIAA at 189 yards-per-game but was last in the MIAA against the run at 228 yards-per-game.

The defense is returning most of its starters, but two of the top three tacklers will not be back: linebacker Eric Sternberg and defensive back Demetrius Lavant, both seniors.

Sophomore defensive back Terrence Byrd and junior linebacker Anthony Freeman agree that effort is the most important thing the defense is working on to improve for next season.



Head coach Gregg Nesbitt instructs freshman linebacker Wade Pelc during a practice this spring. The Bulldogs have switched to a 4-2-5 base defense after they allowed 228 rushing yards per game last season.

Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

"On defense, we're running more than we ever have," Freeman said. "On running backs down the field, we're still chasing them — getting pursuit angles. On incomplete passes, we're still running and scooping up the ball and actually running for the touchdown. The main thing is just playing hard."

"Schematically, you could line up in anything. But if everyone is going to buy into

the system, that's key."

The coaching staff has been grading players on two things every play this spring: a swarm grade and an execution grade. Nesbitt said filmers keep the camera running for two extra seconds after a play to see if players keep running.

Also, Nesbitt has used a two-whistle system at the end of each play. The first whistle blows the play dead. After a couple of seconds the

second whistle means players can stop running.

"If you're not sprinting — if you're not in the frame or sprinting to be in the frame — it's a loaf, pure and simple," Nesbitt said.

Nesbitt also consistently harped on communication during practice, and one drill was specifically designed to get every defensive player on the same page.

"If you have 11 guys on

the field, and three of them don't know what's going on, now you only have eight guys on the field," Freeman said.

Possibly the most noticeable difference is a change in the base defense. The team has implemented a 4-2-5 base formation. The Bulldogs used a 3-4-4 in 2009, and Nesbitt said the team could go back to that at times next season.

Junior defensive lineman

Ryan Ploesser, who started 10 games in 2009, said the 4-2-5 makes it simpler for the linemen.

"We've got one gap to worry about," he said. "We're pretty much a gap defense now instead. Last year a lot of defensive linemen would have to come in, and it's like, 'If this happens, if this happens, you've got to do this — or A, B, C scenarios.'"

To help add depth to the defensive line, sophomore Ryan Summers has switched back to defense. Summers played in nine games in 2008 and recorded 14 tackles before playing offense last year.

The new base scheme could help cut down on rushing yards allowed, which Nesbitt said was "atrocious" last season. He said the average needs to be in the 130 to 140 yards-per-game. The team gave up at least 100 yards every game and more than 200 in seven.

"It just gives you an extra big guy up front to keep the offensive lineman from getting on the linebackers so the linebackers can roam and make plays," Freeman said. "So I guess with that being said, it would be more beneficial in a running conference."

The results already show — at least in practice. The offense's longest run from scrimmage Monday was 12 yards, with three more 8-yard rips added. Nesbitt said those rips used to be 15, 20 or 30 yards during games.

"There's a tremendous difference," he said.

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