

**VAULT** | Senior vaulter/jumper sets multiple records throughout the year

**Continued from Page 15**  
this year. During her sophomore year she improved her vault by two feet, and she gained another four inches her junior year. Going into this season, she held the record in the pole vault at Truman at 12-04.00.

Schwegler said part of that improvement has come from increased confidence.

"During her sophomore and junior year, my job was to get her relaxed during competitions," Schwegler said. "Now I don't have to worry about that as much, because she has the confidence in herself. She's really matured emotionally."

Biermann also competed at the NCAA Div. II Indoor Championship in the triple jump. She competed in the triple jump nine times during the year and won five. She placed fifth at the MIAA Championship meet and sixth at the national meet.

"The [national] meet was very loaded," Cochrane said. "There were some nasty people there. We were hoping she could get a big jump in the first three to get into the finals. She had a really good jump and finished pretty well."

The triple jump is another event Biermann has steadily improved at throughout her four years at Truman. Her best jump as a freshman was 36-08.25. She held the Bulldog record going into this season, with a leap of 38-04.75.

This year during an outdoor meet, Biermann became the first women's jumper in Bulldog history to jump more than 40 feet.

"She wasn't a superstar out of high school," Cochrane said. "She was a 35-foot triple jumper. She's

gotten better and built a track body. She's had a really good year. You don't win all of the time but she's done a great job."

Very few Truman track athletes can claim a season like the one Biermann has had this year.

She won the pole vault at nine meets and won the triple jump eight times this season. She took home first in both events at five different meets.

She has a national championship and already has qualified for the NCAA Div. II Outdoor Championships in the pole vault and triple jump May 27 to 29. Biermann also has broken the Truman record in both events.

"College track is completely different than high school track," Biermann said. "Every meet is like a state meet. You're going against some of the best athletes out there. As a freshman, I was completely terrified. Having experience as a senior really helps me handle competing at the meets."

Biermann could become the second women's track athlete in Truman history to win a national championship in both seasons. Regardless of how she performs at the meet, Cochrane said she has been one of the most successful Truman track athletes.

"Every year the world gets more complicated," Cochrane said. "Pretty soon, you start thinking about what you might do after you graduate. Sometimes people don't have good senior years because of everything else. She's done a great job, though, and put in a lot of work to get there."

**"Sometimes people don't have good senior years because of everything else. She's done a great job, though, and put in a lot of work to get there."**

**John Cochrane**  
Track head coach

**COACH** | Head women's cross country coach takes top honors from Index staff after leading Bulldogs to No. 15 national ranking to end season

**Continued from Page 15**  
its best runner and improve as much as Truman did the following season.

Cochrane pulled off the feat with just one senior on the squad and with three sophomores and two freshmen as the top five runners.

"It's a testament to his ability to communicate with this young generation and get them all on the same page," said Russ Jewett, Pittsburg State University cross country head coach. "I think John is just very genuine and very principled, and if he gets the people in the program that buy into that atmosphere, he will be successful."

Even before the season started, the Bulldogs bought into the system. The team improved enough during the summer that Cochrane predicted it would be better than it was in 2008.

Sophomores Dani Dell'Orco and Anne Ratermann — the two who qualified for nationals — each improved dramatically during spring 2008. Dell'Orco, Ratermann and sophomore Michelle Gronemeyer were expected to compete for scoring spots.

However, the three sophomores were on different running levels for most of the season. Dell'Orco finished first for the Bulldogs, Ratermann's average finish was about 45 seconds behind Dell'Orco and Gronemeyer was about 45 seconds behind Ratermann.

The team would have had little pack running if not for freshmen Cindy Grauel and Karen Grauel. The sisters, who had never run cross country before college, fit right in the middle of Truman's top five. Ratermann and the Grauels finished within 30 seconds of each other in four of the six team meets.

"The 'we' is a whole lot stronger than the 'me,'" Cochrane said, referring to a philosophy taught by NBA coach Phil Jackson. "They were a

pretty good 'we' team this fall."

The top four runners combined for 23 top-20 finishes, including 14 in the top-10.

"There was definitely more of a focus on pack running because there wasn't that clear-cut person," Dell'Orco said. "At every single meeting we had before races he was always encouraging girls, 'Hey, you need to be with so-and-so, you need to move up here.'"

Even Dell'Orco had someone to run with toward the end of the season, despite running ahead of the Truman pack. Cochrane challenged her to run alongside Ashley Siler, the No. 2 from Missouri Southern State University.

"[We] pretty much ran as a team of three and a team of one when they did things," Cochrane said. "And that was one of the things that made us pretty tough, is that they would get out in a race, and they just figured that they were going to run along with everybody. And so we ended up being four people really nasty."

Cochrane stressed two main things that he usually does throughout the season: teammanship and pack running. He said the teammanship aspect was easier than in past years because the team was young — they have fewer distractions now than they would later in college.

Cochrane encouraged the team to spend time together, even outside of practice. Dell'Orco and Ratermann were roommates, while the Grauels already had a close connection. In practice, he stressed the importance of pack running.

"He always wanted everyone together in a pack because that would improve our chances," Karen Grauel said. "So you just always knew that every time you went to practice it was, 'OK, coach wants me up with these people. I need to



**John Cochrane**

be up with these people.' He tried to get it into your head. It became easier after a while."

The cohesiveness worked. When asked what was special about this team, Cochrane said: "The fact that we had those four guys up front that just went and beat on everybody."

The team thrived throughout the season and was favored to finish in the top two at regionals, which would qualify the team for nationals. But a couple runners did not run their best — including Cindy Grauel, who was separated from Ratermann and Karen Grauel early in the race. She never caught up.

At nationals, a similar situation occurred. Ratermann found a runner from Southern and ran well, but Dell'Orco had her worst race of the season after she fell well behind Siler.

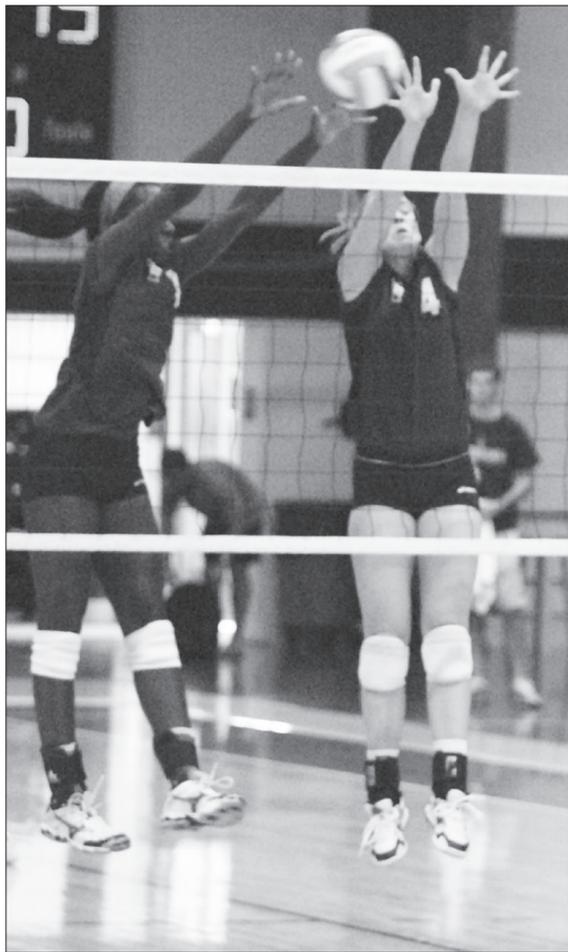
Cochrane said he worked just as hard with the team this year as compared to every other year. Yet this team was extraordinary. Cochrane took two freshmen who had never run cross country and three sophomores to the brink of the second team national berth in Truman history.

"The challenges were that we had a bunch of young people, and we kind of had to get them to be better," Cochrane said. "We didn't know what better was going to be."

**"They were a pretty good 'we' team this fall."**

**John Cochrane**  
Cross country head coach

**SHARPE** | Freshman middle blocker hit .300 or better in 13 of 19 conference matches, led Bulldogs in kills and was second in blocks



**Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index**

**Freshman middle blocker Megan Sharpe (left) was second for Truman with .80 blocks per set but had stellar offensive statistics.**

**Continued from Page 15**

\* Against Emporia State University (two matches): 33 kills, .519 hitting percentage

Sharpe hit .300 or better in 13 of 19 conference matches en route to a season hitting percentage of .354, the second-highest mark in Truman history.

"She's a heck of an athlete," Emporia volleyball head coach Bing Xu said. "She fit in Truman's system very well."

Although Sharpe gave opposing coaches fits, she was just what Truman's first-year head coach Ben Briney needed. Briney took over a program that had graduated six seniors, including three All-Americans, from its 2008 squad that reached the Final Four.

Two of those seniors, including All-American Allie Cherven, anchored the middle blocker position, leaving a big void for Sharpe to fill.

She proved to be more than up to the task. By utilizing her speed and hitting a heavy ball that reaches the floor quickly, Sharpe provided even more offensive production than Cherven did her senior year, despite lacking Cherven's overwhelming power.

"From the time she plants on her last step until she reaches the height of her jump and begins her swing, it's so explosive," Kohler said. "So it's tough for a slower middle — or anybody else, actually, in that front row, unless you've got the quickness that she has — to be able to get up and set a solid block on her."

Sharpe's quickness and explosiveness created a difficult situation for opposing defenses. Opponents could try to stop her one-on-one, or they could put a double blocker on her, which would leave another Truman attacker open. But Briney said Sharpe often used her quickness to get off the kill attempt before the second blocker arrived.

"[Her speed] is a huge help to the offense because there are very few middle blockers who could stay with her, and it really creates matchup problems for the other team from a blocking scheme standpoint," Briney said.

Sharpe wasted little time proving that she would be an offensive force as a freshman. After a fairly mediocre first tournament to open the season, Sharpe began a streak of seven consecutive matches of hitting at least .300 on Sept. 5, during Truman's second tournament of the season.

"When I recruited her, I knew eventually she could be one heck of a player," Briney said. "It was probably by the second weekend that I thought, 'Wow, we've got something special here.'"

**FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR**

Five members of the Index sports staff submitted their top three picks for freshman of the Year. Points were awarded on a 3-2-1 basis, and tiebreakers were broken by most number of first-place votes, then second-place, etc. First-place votes are in parenthesis. Here are the results:

- 1. Megan Sharpe** — Volleyball **13 (4)**
- 2. Olivia Hayes** — Women's soccer **8**
- 3. Jerod Simek** — Men's soccer **5**
- 4. Andy Chapman** — Men's soccer **3 (1)**
- 5. Christine Ulses** — Softball **1**

Sharpe ended up hitting at least .300 in 24 of 36 matches for the season. She recorded 16 or more kills five times. Right-side hitter senior Lauren Graybeal was the only other player to have at least 16 kills in more than one match, and she did it twice.

Briney and Sharpe agreed that Sharpe will need to improve her blocking during the offseason to become a complete player.

Sharpe ranked second for Truman with 0.80 blocks per set, but Truman averaged just 1.8 blocks per set this season, down from 2.5 per set in 2008. Truman ranked eighth in the MIAA in blocking in 2009, and for the first time since 2003, opponents outblocked the 'Dogs.

Blocking was Truman's calling card during the Jason Skoch era (2005 to 2008), and Truman had at least 32 wins each season with Skoch at the helm. For that defensive presence to return in 2010, Briney will look for more production out of players such as Sharpe.

"The position is called a middle blocker," Sharpe said. "You want to have the offense, and that's a big part of it, but you also need to play the defensive part, which is the blocking."

But even if Sharpe's defense improves, Briney still plans to utilize her offensive skills as much as possible for the next three years.

"In the offense that we run, I want the middle hitters to be the focus of it," Briney said. "I want to push the middles, because that opens everything else up."

**YEAR** | Sports editor highlights important dates from Truman athletic year, including two individual national champions

**Continued from Page 15**  
basketball sweeps the season series, the women's basketball team split and volleyball also splits the season series.

**Nov. 23:** Senior Andrew McCall becomes the first Truman student to be named a Rhodes Scholar. The scholarship allows McCall to study at Oxford University in England for two to three years. McCall is one of 32 recipients of the scholarship. He ends his swimming career with five All-Americans, all in relay events.

**Nov. 30:** Freshman middle blocker Megan Sharpe becomes the second volleyball player in Truman history to be named Div. II National Player of the Year. She also is

named an honorable mention All-American, the first Bulldog freshman to be an All-American. Sharpe averages 3.00 kills per set and adds 104 blocks.

Sharpe also plays basketball after the volleyball season. She starts 10 games and averages 3.8 points-per-game. She averages 3.3 rebounds-per-game and is third on the team in blocks.

**Dec. 4:** Director of Athletics Jerry Wollmering names former Bulldog Gregg Nesbitt as head football coach. Nesbitt played football from 1976 to 1979. It is Nesbitt's second time as a Bulldog coach. From 1990 to 1992, he was the defensive coordinator and linebackers coach for then-head coach Eric Holm. He

replaces interim head coach Aaron Vlcko, who had been with the team since 2005.

**Dec. 10:** Senior Katie Reuck becomes the first women's soccer player since 2004 to receive an All-American award. She finishes the season with five goals and is now 10th all-time in Bulldog scoring history. Reuck is the only MIAA player to earn the award.

**Feb. 27:** Both Bulldog basketball teams finish their seasons. The women's team finishes with an 11-16 record, a three-win improvement from last year. The improvement also comes after the Bulldogs' all-time second leading scorer Georgia Mueller graduated. The men's team finishes 5-22,

one win less than last year. Sophomore center Vesko Filchev doubles his minutes and increases his points-per-game average from last year from 6.7 to 11.6.

**March 10:** Senior Kate Aherne wins the 200-yard individual medley at the national meet for the third straight year. Aherne sets a Truman and NCAA record with a time of 2:00.56. She finishes the meet with seven All-American awards. She finishes her Truman career with a total of 27 All-American awards.

**March 12:** Just two days after Aherne captured her national championship, senior Katrina Biermann takes home first place in the pole vault at the NCAA Div. II Indoor Championship.

Biermann becomes the fifth woman from Truman to capture a national championship. She also earns sixth place in the triple jump with a jump of 39-08.00.

**March 23:** Nesbitt adds three new coaches to his staff. Jay Davis will serve as the team's offensive coordinator, Kellen Nesbitt will be the co-defensive coordinator and Jed Paulsen will be in charge of the offensive line and act as the strength and conditioning coach. Thomas Kearney is the lone Bulldog coach to remain from last year's staff and will take wide receiver duties.

**April 25:** Biermann and sophomore Dani Dell'Orco both break Truman records at the Drake Relays in Des

Moines, Iowa. Dell'Orco takes home second in the 5,000-meter run and breaks Kerry Knepper's 1990 record. Her time also nets her an automatic qualifying time for the NCAA Div. II Outdoor Championship.

Biermann breaks her own record in the triple jump and becomes the first women's jumper in Truman history to jump farther than 40 feet. The jump earns her 12th place. She is the only jumper in the top 19 from a Div. II school. She also finishes eighth in the pole vault.

As you can see, the Bulldogs didn't disappoint this year. Stay tuned next year for what I'm sure will be another exciting year in Bulldog sports.