Softball goes 4-2 at Charger Chillout

BY BRENDAN O'BRIEN
Staff Reporter

The Truman softball team got off to a fast start with four wins and two losses at the Alabama-Huntsville Charger Chillout last weekend.

Senior pitcher Richelle van Gennip set the tone for the weekend with a complete game four-hitter in a 3-1 win against Southern Indiana University. Sophomore pitcher Ashley Rotkvich followed van Gennip's performance with a gem of her own against Maryville University, giving up just three hits in six innings, as the offense came alive to propel the 'Dogs to a 9-2 win.

Truman was silenced 9-0 against Bellarmine University (Ky.) on Saturday but rebounded in the second game of the doubleheader and won 2-1 against Kentucky Wesleyan University. On Sunday, Rotkvich pitched 4.1 innings and van Gennip closed out a 6-4 win against the University of West Alabama. Van Gennip stayed on the mound as Truman took the field to face the University of West Georgia. She gave up three runs, one earned, to finish the weekend with 22.2 innings and an ERA of 0.62, but the Bulldogs fell 3-1.

Senior outfielder Erica LaCombe said the four wins reassured players their preseason hopes were not misplaced.

"I really think that it gave validation," LaCombe said. "We all thought that we had the possibility to have a really good season, and I think it was just really, really good to get that validation that it wasn't all wishful thinking."

Questions that came up throughout the offseason relating to depth and adjustments in the line-up became clearer as games played out. Junior shortstop Alex Weber said last year's record (11-34) is a bitter memory but has only increased the team's desire to compete. As the Bulldogs look to win games, playing time is up for grabs.

"We have a lot of different players for every position, so we have a lot of room to move people around," Weber said. "We have a lot of depth on the team, and that's going to help because we have a lot of options to help us win."

Despite hitting just .224 last year, Weber has batted first or second in each game this season and is hitting .500.

"I'm sure she's more confident, feels good about her performance, and I think that's been something that's been sort of coming," Brown said. "We've hoped that she continues to develop into that type of hitter. [She's] scrappy and does anything to get on base. Something that's really improved in Alex from last year is her discipline at the plate."

Weber said she has settled into her role as a slapper. Brown said she was pleased with the team's hitting but expects more run production and better discipline as players grow more accustomed to the new approach of breaking down the hitting zone.

"I felt that our slappers — our left-handed hitters, our quick kids up early in the lineup — did a really good job of getting on base, making things happen and putting pressure on the defense, and I think that really helped to have success this weekend," Brown said.

In addition to her prowess at the plate, Brown said Weber's speed is an asset, as she scored from second base on a single to the second baseman in a game this weekend. Weber said she did not feel any added pressure as an upperclassman.

"We have a lot of leadership on the team, so I'm just playing the best that I can and helping out in any way I can, just as all the players on the team are," Weber said.

Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Sophomore pitcher Ashley Rotkvich went 2-0 in two starts during last weekend's Alabama-Huntsville Charger Chillout. She allowed five earned runs.

LaCombe said the team's first weekend should send a message to the rest of the conference, but that she enjoys the team flying under the radar.

"We're ranked last, and we didn't have a good season last year, and we have eight freshmen," LaCombe said. "It's no shock no one expects us to do well. If you look at our conference — the teams in our conference — their records are not very good at this point, so I think hopefully people will look at it, and it will wake them up and say, 'Hey, Truman is going to bring something this year.' … Or maybe it won't. Maybe no one will even notice, and that might be good too because then we're going to surprise some people."

The Bulldogs look to continue the early success as they head to the Missouri Southern/Pittsburg State Tournament in Joplin this Friday.

TRUMAN ATHLETICS
News and Notes

Softball: Team uses new approach at plate

The softball team has struggled at the plate in recent years, so this season head coach Erin Brown has introduced a new approach she picked up from the University of Missouri in which hitters divide the plate in half to help improve plate discipline.

Through its first six games, the team batting average sits at just .216, but Brown said she knows people learn and adjust at different rates, so she is not concerned by the low average. Despite the batting average, the team seems to have improved in pitch selection. The 'Dogs have taken 20 walks and had three hit batsmen so far. Last year, the team had just 49 walks and were hit by just 14 pitches in 45 games. Although the average is currently lower than 2009, the team on-base percentage is 53 points higher.

In addition, the Bulldogs seem to be making better use of their base runners with 17 steals through six games as opposed to 35 throughout last season.

Women's basketball: 'Dogs excel at foul line

It's been a good year from the foul line for the women's basketball team. The 'Dogs lead the MIAA in free-throw shooting at 78 percent. Despite the proficiency, the Bulldogs have not been to the line often. Truman ranks last in the conference with 392 attempts. The next closest is Missouri Western State University with 429.

Senior guard Laura Joya set a Truman record with her 23rd consecutive made free throw during Saturday's victory against Missouri Western State University. Joya is 43-for-47 from the line, which would lead the MIAA if she had enough attempts to qualify.

Men's Basketball: Garrison improves numbers

Junior guard Stefan Garrison continues to put up impressive numbers in a career season. Garrison has averaged 11 points per game this season. In his first two seasons combined, he scored 162 total points for a 3.2 points-per-game average. Garrison also has set career highs in rebounds, free-throw percentage and field goal percentage. He has made 25 3-pointers after making only eight in his first two seasons.

Garrison has started every game this season after starting just 11 games his first two years. His minutes also have doubled this season, up to nearly 32 minutes per game. He scored a career-high 19 points Feb. 17 in a win against Northwest Missouri State University.

Baseball: Eiskina makes collegiate debut

Freshman pitcher Jarrett Eiskina made his first collegiate pitching appearance in the second game of Truman's five-game series against Quincy University. Eiskina gave up two runs in two innings but also struck out the side in both innings. He ended the weekend with seven strikeouts in three innings.

Eiskina has the Lee's Summit High School record for strikeouts in a season with 66 during his junior year.

Softball: Van Gennip named pitcher of the week

Senior pitcher Richelle van Gennip was named the MIAA softball pitcher of the week. She had a career high 12 strikeouts in a 3-1 complete game victory against Southern Indiana University, the most for a Bulldog since May 2005.

She finished 2-0 with a save in three appearances during the Alabama-Huntsville Charger Chillout last weekend

Baseball opens season with 1-4 mark

Bulldogs lose four-of-five to Quincy University to begin season

BY LOGAN JACKSON
Staff Reporter

The Bulldogs' pitching staff struggled late in games and couldn't keep Quincy University off the base paths.

Quincy ended the weekend with 50 hits and scored 36 runs, taking four out of five from the 'Dogs (1-4) in Marion, Ill. The Hawks scored 14 of those runs in the sixth and seventh innings. The Bulldog bullpen gave up 19 runs in 16 innings during the five-game series.

"I think we saw that we're going to be able to hit up and down the lineup," head coach Dan Davis said. "I think we definitely need to continue to work with our pitchers on being able to throw strikes and get ahead more often. We had a few walks this weekend that were irritating."

Truman had leads in three of four games but won only one.

Truman started the weekend slowly and managed only two hits in the opener. Junior Kyle Veazey took the mound for the Bulldogs and gave up two earned runs and three runs total in four innings. The Bulldog bullpen gave up three more runs, and Truman was shutout, 6-0. Veazey is still winless in his Bulldog career. Senior outfielder Keaton Jones said the team battled back after a tough first game.

"The first game was a little rough because it was our first time seeing live pitching in a while," Jones said. "I thought we had some really good at-bats. We have some stuff to correct, but other than that, I thought we did well."

> "We need to be more aggressive early in the count with hittable pitches. We took a lot of first pitch fastballs for strikes that we should have driven."
>
> **Dan Davis**
> Head Coach

The Bulldogs picked up their first win Saturday in the third game of the series. Truman jumped out to an early four-run lead after five straight hitters reached base in the first inning. The 'Dogs continued to pressure Quincy and put up two more runs in the second inning. Five Bulldog hitters had at least one RBI, and seven hitters had at least one hit.

Five late runs from Quincy closed the gap, but Truman won, 7-5.

Sophomore pitcher Ryan Trimble picked up the win for the Bulldogs, giving up three hits and no runs in five innings. Trimble added five strikeouts and four walks. He won one game all of last year, going 1-6 with a 8.57 ERA.

Truman had leads in the second and fourth games of the series but couldn't keep the lead in either.

Truman led 4-3 going into the fifth inning in the second game but gave up one run in the fifth and three in the sixth.

The same happened in the fourth game. Truman took a 2-0 lead into the second inning, but junior starter Jordan McLaughlin gave up five runs in the inning and seven overall. The Bulldogs battled back and cut the deficit to one, but two runs by the Hawks in the sixth sealed the win. Trimble said the pitching staff needs to improve on some things but had a good weekend overall.

"I think it was just nice to get back on the field and get out of the gym," Trimble said. "We need to throw more strikes instead of walking people or hitting people. We need to just keep ourselves in the game by limiting the damage."

Both teams hit the ball well in the final game of the series. The two teams combined for 27 hits and 18 runs. Quincy scored in every inning but two, and won 11-7.

The Bulldog offense scored 22 runs but didn't take advantage of the 26 walks issued by Quincy pitchers during the weekend. Junior DH Luke Crader and freshman outfielder Brett Budd combined for 13 hits and nine runs, but the rest of the Bulldogs managed just 24 hits and 13 runs. The entire team batted .261 for the weekend, compared to a .333 batting average by Quincy.

Davis said the team will battle at the plate but still needs to improve its hitting philosophy.

"We need to be more aggressive early in the count with hittable pitches," Davis said. "We took a lot of first pitch fastballs for strikes that we should have driven."

The Bulldogs start MIAA play this weekend against No. 10 Emporia State University. Emporia began the season with the No. 1 overall ranking but lost one of three to the University of Central Oklahoma.

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