

TENNIS | Kendall says team has stiff competition at top of MIAA

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This spring will mark the third straight for Bracha playing in the No. 1 singles spot. He compiled a 6-7 mark at that position last spring before going 6-3 this fall.

The Bulldogs have not had a No. 1 singles player compile an above .500 fall-spring overall record since then-senior Ryan Cope went 22-16 in 2006-07.

Kendall said Bracha has always held his own at No. 1, as evidenced by his 23-21 overall record since ascending to the No. 1 spot as a sophomore.

"The thing about him is none of those guys [last spring] beat him badly," Kendall said. "He's always in every match.

"No. 1 is always tough. It doesn't matter who you play. Even though you might play a team that's not very good, they could easily have a decent player or two."

Hipkiss will come in behind Bracha at the No. 2 position. He will look to rebound from a fall in which he went 3-9 in singles play.

"Steven's always been a little bit up and down," Kendall said. "[Monday] night in practice, I don't think he missed a serve. You just never quite know how he's going to [play]. He's a little unknown when he goes out there."

Hipkiss and Bracha will team up to form the No. 2 doubles pairing. The duo has a record of 14-4 since first teaming up last spring.

"Our games match each other pretty well," Bracha said. "I feel like if his serve is on and I'm playing decently, then we can have a chance at pretty much anybody in the conference at that No. 2 position."

Senior John Rothfusz will continue to play primarily doubles this spring. He will pair with Schlotz at the No. 1 doubles duo.

Rothfusz and Schlotz went 4-1 in doubles in the fall.

"Being able to rush the net is I guess our No. 1 strength," Rothfusz said of playing doubles with Schlotz. "And we both have pretty good ground strokes, so that doesn't hurt either."

Rothfusz has battled a chronic shoulder problem throughout his Truman career. In an effort to preserve his shoulder, Rothfusz played only three singles matches in the fall. Kendall said he will continue to use Rothfusz sparingly in singles, likely limiting him to must-win conference matches against UNO and Emporia State.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Head coach Jack Schrader talks to his team in a timeout during Saturday's home finale.

SENIOR | Bulldogs close out season Saturday at No. 2 UCM

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tough, contested shots. Mo. Western shot 36 percent in the first half.

"I think we defended pretty well," Schrader said. "Obviously, if you're not going to score, you must defend. They shot a low percentage in the first half and didn't get a lot of offensive rebounds. We were lucky to be that close."

The two teams traded baskets for much of the second half. Neither team put together a significant run to increase or decrease the lead.

Sophomore center Vesko Filchev kept the Bulldogs close in the second half, going five-for-seven from the field with 11 points. He scored seven straight points to begin the half, but the Bulldogs couldn't close the gap. Truman shot the ball much better in the half, but the defense couldn't slow

down Mo. West. The Griffons shot 65.4 percent from the field and scored 42 points. Filchev said the team has struggled in the first half for most of the season.

"First of all, coach Schrader's talk in the locker room always changes things," Filchev said. "We're a team that usually plays down in the first half, but comes out strong [in the second half]. I came out with the mindset to somehow lead the team and bring us close."

Filchev led the way for the Bulldogs with 15 points and nine rebounds. Freeman was the only other Bulldog in double figures with 12 points.

Senior guard Marcus Rhodes led the charge for the Griffons. He scored 26 points and shot 10-for-13 from the field. The Bulldogs used four different players to guard

him, but no one could stop the 6-foot-2 guard.

"He's just strong and wide and can get to the basket," Schrader said. "He has a soft touch around the basket. They play in a lull-you-to-sleep rhythm. We were disappointed with our performance."

The Bulldogs play their final game of the season at 3:30 p.m. Saturday against the No. 3 University of Central Missouri. The Mules won the MIAA regular season title and are 18-1 in MIAA play. Freeman said the team will be relaxed during its last game of the season, and the last for Taylor.

"We're excited for [the game] because we have nothing to lose," Freeman said. "It's our last time together as a group. There's no pressure on us, so we're just going to play."

FANS | The Novinger high school graduates recall 57 years of Truman men's basketball history

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former players and two fans was a fitting way to end Andy and Anita's 57th season of attending men's basketball games.

The Steeles connection to Truman athletics started when Anita worked at Norton Bohon's dentist office in Kirksville.

Dr. Bohon was the dentist for the University's football and basketball teams. It was there that Anita made friendships with many players and coaches during her 30 years working for Dr. Bohon. It was there that the Steeles fell in love with Truman men's basketball.

"I got really close to a lot of them personally," Anita said. "Like family almost."

The 1953 and '54 Novinger High School graduates started attending basketball games in the fall of 1953 when Andy began his freshman year as an industrial arts major at Truman, then called Northeast Missouri State Teachers College.

Numerous things at Truman have changed since Andy and Anita first started attending games. The team originally played in Kirk Gym. Nick-

named "The Pitt," Andy said Kirk Gym provided a much smaller and intimate atmosphere, often making it hard to find a seat.

Even Pershing Arena has undergone changes since the Bulldogs defeated Northern Iowa University in their first game at Pershing in Dec. 1959. The court in Pershing ran east and west, with the bleachers on the north and south walls.

The Steeles, both 74, have missed few games during the 57-year run, but it has taken things like snow storms and illnesses to keep them from attending games. Andy, a retired carpenter missed one season when he was stationed in Germany serving time in the Army. But word of how the Bulldogs performed made it to him through letters from Anita.

Andy and Anita occasionally traveled to Quincy University (Ill.) and Lincoln University to watch the Bulldogs play. Andy said one of his fondest memories was watching the Bulldogs defeat Lincoln in Jefferson City for the MIAA title in 1979, the last time the Bulldogs won the regular season conference title.

The Steeles' dedication has not gone unnoticed by the University. Roger Johnson, a custodian at Truman and a friend of the Steeles, helped honor Andy and Anita for their dedication to the program during a game last season. The team autographed a ball for them, and the seniors presented it to them in their sixth-row seats. Local businesses donated gift cards, the basketball team presented them with a shirt and hat and gave them free season tickets this season.

Andy said they weren't paying attention and were surprised when the public address announcer asked the Steeles to stand up and be recognized.

"I was like, 'Why do we have to stand up?'" Anita said.

Through the years Andy and Anita have made Bulldog basketball a family affair. They brought their son, Alan, to his first game when he was two weeks old. Keeping with tradition, Alan's son made his first appearance at a Bulldog basketball game when he was two weeks old.

While the Steeles made Bulldog basketball a family outing, the team often returned the favor: Alan said he remembers players coming to watch him play summer-league baseball during high school. One former player, Bob Young, made sure to visit the Steeles whenever he returned to Kirksville.

Alan said he still attends a few games every year, but he said his par-

ents' dedication to the men's basketball program is in another league.

"If I had to sum them up in one word it's that they are 'diehard,'" Alan said.

Head coach Jack Schrader said the Steeles represent an important part of Bulldog history. He said what makes their situation unique is that they made friendships with former coaches like Boyd King and Willard Sims.

"Andy and Anita Steele are a part of that tradition," Schrader said.

For the Steeles, it's not all about the win-loss record. It doesn't matter to Andy and Anita that the Bulldogs finished last in the MIAA this season. They said the love of basketball would keep them returning to Pershing for years to come.

"If it was me, I'm the type of person that if the team wasn't winning I'd have probably given up on them," Alan said. "They are diehard. It wouldn't matter if they didn't win a game for 10 years, they'd still go."

The final minutes wound down on another season of Bulldog basketball, and Andy, Anita, Misiewicz, and Sanders finished their moment of reliving Bulldog history. The four went their separate ways, but it won't be Andy and Anita's last time in their sixth-row seats.

"We'd like to make it to 60 anyhow," Andy said.

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