

Softball falls to 7-13 for season

BY BRENDAN O'BRIEN
Staff Reporter

The softball team seems to have hit a wall as conference play approaches.

The Bulldogs fell to 7-13 with a 4-1 loss to Fort Hays State University and a 12-3 loss to Northwest Missouri State University at the Cross-over Tournament on Friday.

Truman originally was scheduled to play five conference opponents Friday and Saturday in Warrensburg, Mo., but the games were limited and moved to Emporia, Kan., because of the threat of inclement weather.

Although both were conference opponents, the games counted as non-conference games.

Freshman outfielder Laura Miller said the games were important for knowing what to expect when the Bulldogs begin conference play Saturday at home against Washburn University.

"We got to see what their hitters were like, what their pitchers were like and just kind of get a feel for how their team was in general," Miller said. "I think we're preparing mentally for conference teams more so than the other teams we've faced because they're big games, and our conference is really tough."

Junior pitcher Beth Schnurbusch got the start in the early game against Fort Hays (9-7). She fell behind early when an error by freshman right fielder Christine Ulises allowed the Tigers' Sara Tani to advance after a single. She later came home on a sacrifice fly, and the Tigers padded their ear-

ly lead with a solo home run later in the inning.

Fort Hays added one more in the second, and the game remained 3-0 until Ulises came to the plate and blasted a solo shot for the 'Dogs in the top of the fourth. The Tigers put a cap on the scoring in the bottom half of that inning with a lead-off home run. Senior pitcher Richelle van Gennip entered in relief and kept Fort Hays scoreless for the final three innings, but Truman could not come alive offensively.

Head coach Erin Brown said the Tigers' left-handed pitcher gave the Bulldogs fits at the plate with her combination of rise balls and drop balls on the outside corner. The 'Dogs struggled to adjust early in the game, and the first six outs at the plate all came on strikeouts. Freshman Kristin Grossman said that although it was frustrating to watch, she expects the hitting to improve with upcoming games.

"We've been a pretty good hitting team in practice and at the very beginning of the season," Grossman said. "I think all of us just ended up in a slump around the same time, and I think we just need to work in a couple more games before we can get out of that, but we're starting to see the upside of that."

Grossman gave Truman a 2-0 lead against Northwest when she connected on a curveball over the outer half of the plate for a home run. Van Gennip gave up a grand slam at the start of the fourth inning as things began to unravel for the 'Dogs. Sophomore pitcher Ashley Rotkovich replaced van Gennip. She fared no better, as



Left: Freshman third baseman Kristin Grossman practices last week in preparation for the home opener against Washburn. Right: Senior pitcher Richelle van Gennip works on her mechanics during drills earlier this season.



the Tigers piled on eight runs in the next four innings.

Despite the lopsided defeat, the first four hitters in the Truman lineup all recorded a hit, and Grossman said the success of the front part of the lineup is essential for the team's success.

"It's definitely something we've been working on, and that needs to happen a majority of the games just because our faster girls are in the 1-2-3 spots," Grossman said. "We really

need those first three runners on base in order for the four, five hitters to hit them in, but I think we've been getting a lot better at that in game situations."

Miller had missed four games after sustaining a concussion at the Missouri Southern/Pittsburg State Tournament on Feb. 26-28, and her hit in the first inning against Northwest was her first since that point. Brown said her presence in the lineup was missed and that the team's hit-

ting needs a wake-up call.

"We need to be more consistent offensively, and we need to get our pitchers more on track with their pitches, Brown said. "The thing with Washburn and Emporia coming up this weekend [is] ... they have the ability to put up a lot of runs in a game, so we have some really tough competition ahead of us because we have to shut their offense down and, at the same time, we really need to pick it up and be more productive offensively

throughout the entire line-up."

Miller said one thing that might actually help the Bulldogs is that conference opponents do not expect much from them.

"We have eight freshmen, so the other conference teams don't really know what to expect from us, I think," Miller said. "We ranked last in our conference last season, so we don't really have anything to lose and everything to gain this season."

Athlete of the Week

Brett Budd

Sport: Baseball
Position: Outfielder
Year: Freshman
Hometown: Lee's Summit, Mo.

Freshman outfielder Brett Budd went 7-for-14 with four runs scored against the University of Nebraska-Omaha last weekend. He has a .444 on-base percentage and is second for Truman with a .878 OPS.

Budd shines against Nebraska-Omaha

BY BLAKE TOPPMAYER
Editor in Chief

As a new face in the MIAA, freshman outfielder Brett Budd might surprise a few conference pitchers with his bat this year. But nothing Budd does at the plate will surprise his head coach, Dan Davis.

Budd, hitting .340 through 20 games, is producing like the player Davis recruited from Lee's Summit High School, where Budd slugged almost .700 his senior season.

"We definitely thought he would [perform offensively]," Davis said. "Brett Budd is a good hitter. He was our best hitter in the fall, and he is once again doing an awesome job of staying calm and just letting his ability take over at the plate."

Budd showcased steady offense Sunday and Monday during the baseball team's four-game series against MIAA opponent University of Nebraska-Omaha.

Budd went 7-for-14, scored four runs and had an RBI. Budd's .500 series batting average stood out even more because the Bull-

dogs hit only .211 as a team against the Mavericks, who rank third in the MIAA in ERA. No other Truman player had more than three hits during the series.

"He didn't miss his pitch," Davis said. "When they threw a hittable pitch when he was up, he put a good swing on it."

Although Budd has been reaching base with regularity with a .444 on-base percentage, 14 of his 18 hits have been singles. But Davis said he thinks Budd will start hitting for power as he develops. Budd has a past track record for power hitting. His on-base plus slugging percentage was about 1.300 his senior season at Lee's Summit. Even with only four extra-base hits for Truman this season, Budd still ranks second among Bulldogs with an .878 OPS.

Budd's hits often have come in bunches. He has played in 17 games and recorded a hit in nine of them. But he also has seven multi-hit games, including three against UNO.

"Obviously hitting is contagious, so I just try to build off that first hit and keep go-

ing," Budd said.

Budd's highlight performance against the Mavericks was his 3-for-4 day at the plate in Game 1. In that game, Budd collected a key single in the top of the fifth inning to drive home the tying run.

"I believe it was a fastball I hit," Budd said. "He left it over the middle of the plate, and I just drove it out into centerfield."

Truman ended up losing the game 8-6 in six innings.

If Budd has struggled with anything this season, it has been strikeouts. He leads the team with 19, but 10 of those came during a six-game stretch spanning late February to early March, when Budd primarily was batting second in the lineup. Davis since lowered Budd to the No. 6 or 7 spot, and Budd has found success there.

"We definitely like him at the top of our lineup to get him more at-bats, but at the same time he's producing very well at the bottom half of the lineup, so we're probably going to keep him for a while and just let him do his thing," Davis said.



Submitted by Jarrett Eiskina
Freshman outfielder Brett Budd swings at a pitch during a game against Quincy University earlier this season.



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