

# Men's Basketball Preview

## Bulldogs look for fresh start in '09

**Bulldogs won just 1 MIAA game last year**

BY LOGAN JACKSON  
Staff Reporter

Chemistry problems plagued the men's basketball team last year, causing the program's lowest number of MIAA wins in seven years.

The Bulldogs, who start the season against Culver-Stockton College on Monday, finished 6-21 last year and had only one conference win. They got off to a fast start, with five straight wins to open the season. However, with a tough conference schedule, the 'Dogs won only one of their following 22 games.

"Last year we just had terrible chemistry," head coach Jack Schrader said. "It sort of blindsided me. We had symptoms of it at the beginning of fall conditioning and it resurfaced during the season. We put Band-Aids on it and got through the season."

Truman also had trouble closing out games last year. The team shot just under 68 percent from the free-throw line and averaged

nearly 15 turnovers per game. Last year, the Bulldogs lost eight games by fewer than 10 points. Junior forward Ethan Freeman said the team usually would go on an early run in the second half but had trouble finishing.

"Closing out games is really important for us," Freeman said. "Playing the entire 40 minutes is a key attribute to whether we win or lose. In our conference games, especially, we have to come prepared."

This season, the Bulldogs will rely on experience to get back into MIAA contention. The roster contains nine returning players, five of whom have at least seven starts.

The team will be led by its only senior, guard Matt Taylor. Taylor, a two-sport athlete at Truman, is fresh off his final soccer season and has participated in a few practices for the Bulldogs. Schrader said Taylor was a logical choice to be the leader of the team, mainly because he is the only member with any playoff experience. He was a member of the 2005-06 team that reached the NCAA Tournament.

Also returning for the Bulldogs are junior guards Alex Henderson and Stefan Garrison, forward Brian Nwelu and sophomore center Vesko Filchev.

Freeman was second in points, rebounds, field-goal percentage and assists for the Bulldogs last year and also logged the second-most minutes on the

team. Filchev led the team in field goal percentage. Schrader said Filchev's conditioning has greatly improved from last season.

With Filchev on the floor, the Bulldogs can create several match-up problems for opposing teams. Because of Filchev's 6-foot-10, 280-pound frame, most MIAA teams won't be able to guard him straight up. Henderson said having him on the court could really motivate the Bulldogs offensively.

"Vesko is tough to guard one-on-one," Henderson said. "If [opposing teams] have to double down on him, that's just going to open things up for everyone else."

Schrader said the team still is trying to figure out what type of defense to play. Schrader's teams usually play a man-to-man defense, but this year the Bulldogs could switch to a zone.

"The problem we're having now is defensively," Schrader said. "In the MIAA,

we'll play some undersized teams. [Filchev] has got to stay on the floor. To be the best that we can be, we've got to play zone."

By using a zone, Filchev won't be

pulled out to the perimeter or have to guard smaller, quicker players. Schrader said the main concern is rebounding the ball, especially after the Bulldogs lost top rebounder Patrick Fandja to graduation.

"Rebounding is a huge question out of a zone," Schrader said. "Whoever can rebound has a great chance to play."

Truman also will look to replace guard Banks Estridge, who graduated after last year. Estridge did most of the ball handling for the Bulldogs.

Schrader said the Bulldogs will use a committee of point guards early in the season. Henderson and Taylor have the most experience, but freshmen Matt Patterson and Tom Norton could also provide depth at the point guard spot.

Schrader said the starting lineup hasn't been determined.

"I think our rotation will be tighter," Schrader said. "Vesko has improved to the point where he can play our different systems a little bit better. We're pretty close to finding a comfortable way to play with him, also."

Henderson said it has to be a team effort if the Bulldogs want to get back into contention for the MIAA Tournament. He said the team must develop good chemistry to be successful.

"We've got to get rid of turnovers and we've got to play tougher this year," Henderson said. "Sometimes [last year] we didn't play tough enough mentally or physically and that caused a lot of turnovers."



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Sophomore center Vesko Filchev is one of nine returners.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Junior guard Stefan Garrison averaged 14 minutes a game off the bench last season and should provide depth at guard.

## Replacing Banks

The Bulldogs will have to replace the production of former point guard Banks Estridge

No. 10 in career steals  
Led team in scoring last season  
Led team in assists and steal last three seasons



Rose Runser/Index

## 'Dogs search for point guard

BY BLAKE TOPPMEYER  
Editor in Chief

There was no mystery in who would bring the ball down the floor during men's basketball games the past three seasons. Banks Estridge claimed the point guard spot in every game for three seasons before graduating after last season.

Now, just days away from Truman's season-opener against Culver-Stockton College on Monday, the answer to the question of who handles Truman's point guard duties remains unclear.

Head coach Jack Schrader said on Monday that he expects several Bulldogs to share the point guard duties. Junior guard Alex Henderson, senior guard Matt Taylor and freshmen guards Tom Norton and Matt Patterson are all options.

"Everybody will get the shot," Schrader said. "It's possible we play three of them ... on the court at one time. We'll figure it out. Time will tell."

"I think off of rebounds, we'll designate who's going to push it because I think that organizes the fast break better. ... But other than that, it could be by committee."

Henderson likely will handle the point guard role to start Monday's game. He started at point guard for Truman in Friday's exhibition game against the University of Missouri.

Henderson played off-guard for the Bulldogs the last two seasons, starting 15 games at that spot last year. At the off-guard position, Henderson was the Bulldogs' primary three-point threat. He drained 56 three-pointers (39 percent) in his first two seasons wearing the purple and white.

Although Henderson hasn't run the point much previously at Truman, he was a point guard all four seasons at Willard High School (Mo.). Henderson said he is comfortable at either the point guard or off-guard position and he doesn't think shifting to point guard would limit his three-point opportunities.

"I like to have the ball in my hands," Henderson said. "I like to be able to help control the offense, get us into it. I think that's one of my strengths."

"I try to be an extension of our coach on the floor. So I guess when I have the ball in my hands, that might be better for my skill set. But at the same time, I'm comfortable running off screens and getting more shots probably if you're at the 2-guard."

Norton played 30 minutes off the bench against Mizzou. He is an option at point or

could fill Henderson's sharpshooting off-guard role if Henderson is on the floor running the point.

Norton was the 2009 Illinois three-point champion and set a school record at Bloomington Catholic High School with 90 three-pointers in his senior season. Norton played off-guard at Bloomington Catholic until his senior season when he took over the point.

"I like running the point, handling the ball," Norton said. "And that's what I'll be maybe doing this year so I'm looking forward to that."

Like Norton, Patterson put up big outside shooting numbers with 93 threes in his senior season at South Shelby High School (Mo.).

"Our two freshmen can shoot the ball really well," Henderson said. "They're going to help us in that capacity."

While the two freshmen provide three-point shooting threats, Schrader said Taylor is the Bulldogs' best on-the-ball defender. Schrader has dubbed Taylor, the lone senior on Truman's

roster, as the Bulldogs' leader for the season. Taylor averaged about 10 minutes per game last season, primarily coming off the bench.

All the guards will have the challenge of helping improve Truman's turnover numbers. The Bulldogs accumulated 402 turnovers last year (14.89 per

game), which led the MIAA and was the 'Dogs' highest turnover mark per game since 1997-98.

But not all of Truman's turnover woes from last season can be attributed to guard play. Junior forward Ethan Freeman and 2008-09 senior forward Patrick Fandja ranked second and third, respectively, for the Bulldogs in total turnovers.

In Truman's offense in which the forwards often handle the ball, Schrader said the forwards need to value the ball more and make smarter decisions.

"They have to recognize they have outs where they don't have to make hard passes," Schrader said. "A lot of turnovers are simply decisions, trying to do something you can't do."

Henderson (45 assists, 39 turnovers in 2008-09) was one of just two Bulldogs who had a positive assist-to-turnover ratio last season. Estridge, who led the team with 87 assists, was the other player with a positive ratio.

"That's definitely one of the biggest things we're trying to do this year is limit those turnovers," Henderson said. "We feel like we were in a lot of close games but lost a lot of close games. [By improving] turnovers and free throws, we win those games."