

STERNBERG

Linebacker looks to end season on high note

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fact that the Bulldogs haven't beaten Pitt State since 1980, it could be a tough day for Truman.

But if Sternberg is able to break through the line and sack the quarterback a couple times, he might not just end up as the Bulldog single-season sack leader. He might also end up near the top in Div. II for 2009. Sternberg has a legitimate chance to finish No. 2 in the country in sacks. He is ranked fifth in Div. II in sacks, only one sack behind No. 2 Jashawn Williams of American International University.

Despite the outburst this season, Sternberg hasn't always been known as a sack demon at Truman. He recorded 15 sacks in his senior season at Lockport Township high school, but prior to his 10.5 sacks this season, the most sacks Sternberg had in a season at Truman was three in 2005.

"I think I just became more confident in some of the moves I learned," Sternberg said. "Playing for four years, you kind of learn tendencies from different teams and watch more film."

Sternberg's athletic abilities aren't limited to the football field though. In high school Sternberg not only had his eyes on the quarterback, he also stared into the pitcher's eyes from the batter's box. During high school, Sternberg was selected to the all-conference team twice and was the 2005 Chicago Sun-Times state tournament MVP.

Sternberg said he inquired about playing baseball at Truman when he arrived in 2005, but former football head coach Shannon Currier told Sternberg to be with the football team for spring ball and offseason workouts since he most likely would be playing for four years.

"I definitely thought about it — it's always [been] a passion of mine, but I felt it's better to be good at one thing than decent at two things," Sternberg said.

Sternberg's focus on football has not only been helpful for himself, but also for many of the young players on the Bulldog defense.

"I would say for me personally he's definitely someone that I look up to," sophomore linebacker Richie Schumaker said. "He definitely pushes me to be at my best all the time because he's older, and definitely bigger, faster [and] stronger than me."

With the guarantee of a last-place finish in the MIAA for the first time since 2005, it is safe to say things have not gone the way the team had hoped, especially on the defensive side of the ball where the 'Dogs rank near the bottom of the MIAA in run defense and total defense.

As the Bulldogs look toward next season, with Sternberg graduating, head coach Aaron Vlcko said the impact he has had on younger players hopefully will reverberate through the program in the coming seasons to boost the struggling defense.

"When you have one of your best players who is a hard worker that has had to work hard to have the success he has had, they're going to watch him and recognize that's what it takes to be a player at that level," Vlcko said.

While Sternberg has a chance to break the single-season sack record Saturday, Nourse said Sternberg missed several opportunities for sacks earlier in the season because he was playing too aggressively and not focused on just tackling.

"He probably missed six or seven sacks early on in the season because he was trying to knock the quarterback out of the game instead of tackling the quarterback," Nourse said. "[I told him] you don't have to knock him out of the game. And then all of a sudden — I can't remember which game it was — he just came in and tackled him."

Both Vlcko and Nourse said that Sternberg's success this season has come from hard work during his time at Truman and his relentlessness to reach the quarterback.

"I'd love to have four Eric Sternbergs," Nourse said. "I'd love to have 11."

FOOTBALL

Team returns to the wildcat, with Emokpae taking snaps, with struggling passing game



Brian O'Shaughnessy /Index
Senior receiver Charlie Burnette catches a pass during a game earlier this season. The Bulldogs lost 37-7 against Washburn on Saturday.

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The Ichabods added a field goal and broke the game open in the second quarter with a 17-point outburst to take a 27-0 halftime lead. Truman trailed 37-0 before running back Har-nish Ayora scored from 1-yard out to put Truman on the scoreboard.

The Bulldogs tried to emphasize their running game Saturday, running the ball 42 times for 100 yards, including several plays in which Emokpae ran the ball out of the wildcat formation. Vlcko said the offensive game plan for the Bulldogs was to run the ball as much as possible to control the time of possession because junior quarterback Phil Davis was banged up from injuries suffered this season.

Davis completed 6 of 14 passes for 48 yards and an interception. Truman led in time of possession by six seconds, but Vlcko said the Bulldogs needed to have the ball for more than 35 minutes to have a chance at winning the game.

Moore averaged 13.1 yards per carry by using a running attack straight up the middle and off tackle. His 227 yards included a 71-yard touchdown run late in the second quarter.

Washburn's running success was similar to last week when Emporia State University sported an option attack that netted 375 yards against Truman.

"They are a pretty good team and have one of the best offenses in the league," freshman linebacker Richie Schumaker said. "We just gave up a couple big plays here and there that hurt."

Truman finished 2-for-15 on third downs, with 10 of the third downs from five yards or longer.

"Really it's just a matter of not being able to open up and throw the football a whole lot," Vlcko said.

Senior linebacker Eric Sternberg added a sack in the third quarter. He has 10.5 sacks this season, 1.5 away from tying the all-time single season Bulldog record.

Truman's last chance to get a MIAA victory will be at 1 p.m. Saturday against Pittsburg State University. Truman hasn't beaten the Gorillas since 1980. The game will mark Senior Day for the Bulldogs.

"It's going to be fun — it's going to be sad," Sternberg said. "You know I love football, and it's going to be sad to miss out on a lot of the guys, but I kind of went through it last year because a lot of the guys I came in with graduated. It's going to be exciting for me, and I know it's going to be exciting for other guys, and we are going to play as hard as we can and get a win."

NATIONALS

Men aim for rebound in regional meet

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"It's OK if the girl beats her, but you need to be able to breathe on her, and we didn't quite get that done," Cochrane said.

Another key is for the Bulldogs' middle pack to stay ahead of Pitt's middle pack. The two teams were separated by just 13 points at the MIAA meet after a 40-point differential on the GLVC/MIAA Challenge on Oct. 10.

"It'll be a tough battle. We don't match up real well, especially with Truman, in terms of head-to-head," said Russ Jewett, Pittsburg State head coach. "So it's going to be hard to find them during the race and really lock in on them as a team with all those other bodies in there."

Jewett said the key for Gorillas is to have someone from their pack break off from the rest.

"We have to have one of those women lead the charge and just beat those girls from Truman," Jewett said.

Truman has had an individual compete at nationals each of the last three years, capped off by 2008-senior Danna Kelly's 24th-place finish last year. The 'Dogs have not advanced to nationals as a team since 2004, when they finished 20th.

Even if the entire team does not advance to nationals, Dell'Orco could qualify as an individual. To do so, she has to finish either in the top five overall or in the top two runners not on a national qualifying team.

"The way it would look here — [she] better be in the top five," Cochrane said.

The regional course consists of a 2K loop that repeats itself. It is the flattest course the team has run this season, which Cochrane said favors the track-oriented runners but can hurt runners who prefer hills.

On the flat course at the Brissman-Lundeen Invitational on Sept. 25, the Bulldogs finished first out of 21 teams. However, that competition was not as good as what the team will see Saturday.

Cochrane said runners will have to go out faster than normal because of the flatter course.

"You don't want to let them get away from you because there's nothing that can help you get back up," Cochrane said. "I guess if you're a horse enough that you can kick hard and finish hard, then yeah, but I would look for people to go out hard." The situation is slightly

different for the men's team. Instead of competing for a spot at nationals, the men are attempting to rebound from a sub-par race at the conference meet. Head coach Tim Schwegler said the goal is to finish in the top 10. He said anywhere from 16 to 20 schools will attend the meet.

The men placed 11th in 2008, just 10 points out of the top 10.

"We're not going to worry so much about times," Schwegler said. "We're going to get ourselves in a position so that we can be one of those top 10 teams, like we were earlier in the year. We should be there, so we're going to try to get ourselves there."

Junior Adam Kell, who was held out of the MIAA meet because of sickness, will help the team with his return to the lineup. However, sophomore Joey Walls still is nursing an ankle injury and is questionable for Saturday's race.

Schwegler said the Texas weather should not be an issue — the forecast is in the mid-50s.

"We just have to execute better," Schwegler said. "We can't back off. We just have to keep pushing."



Brian O'Shaughnessy /Index
Senior Fiona Williams will compete in her last South Central regional cross country meet Saturday in Abilene, Texas.

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