

No. 11 'Dogs upset No. 7 Incarnate 3-2

Men's soccer defeats St. Edwards 1-0, now ranked No. 1 in region

BY BRENDAN O'BRIEN
Staff Reporter

With last year's shutout loss still fresh in their minds, the No. 11 men's soccer team jumped out to a 3-0 lead against No. 7 University of the Incarnate Word (Texas) and never looked back.

Truman improved its record to 6-1 as they beat Incarnate 3-2 on Friday and St. Edward's University (Texas) 1-0 on Sunday.

But the 'Dogs had a lot of odds stacked against them. It was a long road trip, a foreign atmosphere and they were without senior defender Dan Russell who missed the games because of family obligations.

The team controls its own destiny as the wins against Incarnate and St. Edward's catapulted Truman to the top spot in the South Central Region of the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) poll. The top two teams from the region go to the playoffs.

"We kind of used that [loss to Incarnate] as motivation," senior midfielder Drew Pauk said. "They came up here last year and got a 1-0 victory against us. That was just all the more motivation for us to push, try to get a win on their home field."

Truman scored all three goals in the opening 14 minutes. Incarnate threatened twice in the opening minutes, but redshirt freshman keeper Tyler Knierim kept both attempts out of the net.

In the seventh minute, Truman struck first. Sophomore forward Jonathan Brown's shot ricocheted off the crossbar, but junior forward Nick Schlichtman was there for his second goal of the year put the team up 1-0. The Bulldogs never surrendered the lead.

"It just got us rolling, and we all just got pumped up and excited to keep playing," junior midfielder Dan Meagher said.

Truman kept on the attack as Meagher buried a shot in goal in the 11th minute.

"We were moving around," Meagher said. "We got the ball out wide to [junior midfielder] Scott Biggerstaff, and he did his job to beat a guy to the end line and passed the ball into the middle. I was unmarked on the back post and finished it."

Three minutes later, junior midfielder Bobby Larkin joined the scoring when he beat Incarnate keeper Ryan Eschenburt to the near post.

Incarnate continued to fight and got on the board when the ball deflected off a Truman defender into the back of the net in the 28th minute. The 'Dogs entered halftime with a 3-1 lead.

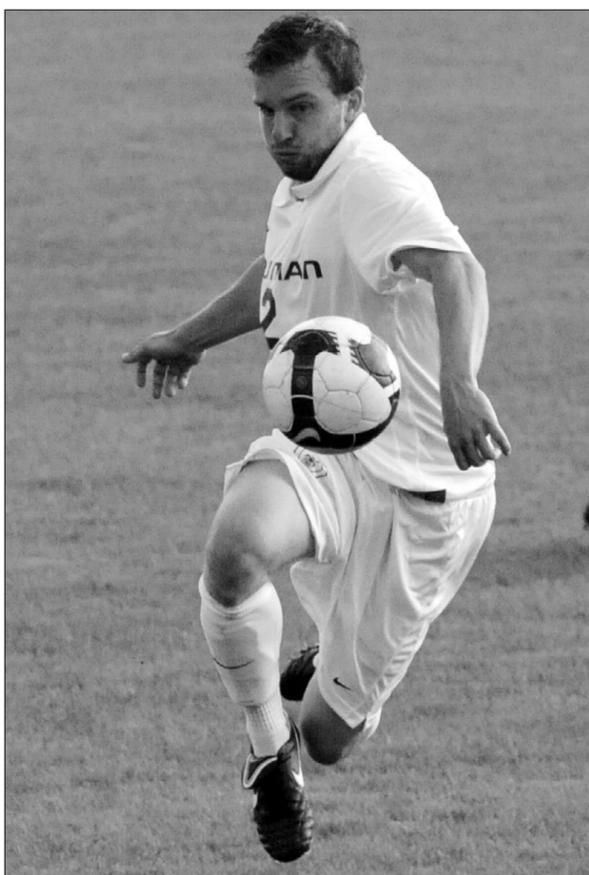


Photo submitted by George Barlow
Junior forward Matt Kimball knees the ball during a game earlier this season. The Bulldogs improved their season record to 6-1.

The 'Dogs followed Cochran's advice to continue to attack and stick to the style of play that had brought them to that point. Cochran kept legs fresh by subbing players throughout the second half.

"I couldn't say enough about the subs that came in off the bench," Pauk said. "Our bench came in strong, people played positions that they normally wouldn't play and did the jobs that they needed to do to make sure we got the win."

Incarnate's Justin Odette's goal off a corner kick in the 82nd minute made for a tense finish to the game, but Truman held on for the upset.

"We know it's not going to be easy, especially to a team like Incarnate," Cochran said. "Hats off to them — they were good."

Perhaps as tough as Friday's win was getting refocused for the team's game against St. Edward's just 40 hours later. Cochran credited his players for their ability to stay level-headed throughout the weekend. Meagher acknowledged it was not easy but said the team knew what was at stake.

"We were all pretty fatigued," Meagher said. "It was a long game on Friday. It just drained us emotionally and physically, but we knew that we had to finish the

road trip with the win."

St. Edward's was a different type of game with more but it had a familiar result: a Truman victory. Meagher made the most of a foul in the box, sending his penalty kick past St. Edward's Matt Moore and into the net for the game's lone goal. It was Meagher's fourth goal of the season, tying him with Larkin for the team lead.

The 'Dogs are nearing the end of their month-long road stretch with upcoming games against Newman College (Kan.) on Sunday and No. 8 Rockhurst University on Wednesday. The team returns to Kirksville on Friday, Oct. 2 to face Northeastern State University (Okla.).

"Morale's high, we've won six games in a row and I think everyone's excited for what we've done in the past, but we're not satisfied," Pauk said. "We want to keep going, get in the tournament, and I think we're starting to believe what we're capable of this year."

For more on men's soccer, including an interview with head coach Duke Cochran and senior Drew Pauk, please view the Index Sports Show at trumanindex.com

Defensive vets provide core for Bulldogs

The men's soccer team has the complete package.

The 'Dogs are the only team to score against No. 10 Drury University this season, and they scored three goals in the first 14 minutes against No. 16 Incarnate Word Texas on Friday.

The No. 11 Bulldogs (6-1) are averaging 2.57 goals per game, up from 1.39 in 2008. If that average holds up, it will be the most goals scored by the 'Dogs since they averaged 2.8 in 2003.

But although the offense might be the biggest difference from last year, the defense continues to be the backbone of the team.

Led by senior starters Jack Randazzo, Dan Russell, Matt Taylor and captain Drew Pauk, the defense has allowed three goals in the past six games and has a 1.00 goals against average for the season.

Throw in senior midfielder Ben Green, who has experience at defense and started in place of Russell in Sunday's match against St. Edwards University (Texas), and all the starting defenders have started for at least two years.

"Those are the dogs," head coach Duke Cochran said. "We're Bulldogs, but those guys in the back are the dogs, and they hunt in packs. That is what happens if you play against us. And there are guys off the bench that are ready to do it, too. But we do defend as a team, but those guys in the back — they take it very seriously."

After the season-opening 4-2 loss to Drury, which Cochran said "woke the team up," the defense has posted four shutouts in the next six games and not allowed more than 12 shots in a game. The team demonstrated its shutdown mode when it stopped a barrage of offense to preserve a 3-2 lead in the last 10 minutes against Incarnate.

The Incarnate win is a big reason why the team now is ranked No. 1 in the South Central Regional. The region's top two teams will make the playoffs.

Cochran said the team likes to use three defenders and seven attackers when possible, but Truman will sometimes switch to a four defender, six attacker scheme if the offense can produce results.

However, almost everyone on the team has both attacking and defending skills. Cochran said Russell is good at direct free kicks, Taylor at dribbling, Randazzo with headers and Pauk can score from 30 yards and in.

The parity can make it seem like there are always 10 attackers and 10 defenders on the field.

"We defend as a team," Cochran said of the team's formation. "We



Commentary
JACK NICHOLL

play with 10." Redshirt freshman goalie Tyler Knierim is backing up the defense. Knierim has posted a 0.50 GAA in his six starts this season.

Knierim stepped in at starter in place of junior Kyle Talbot as keeper after the first game of the season as he won the battle of freshman vs. two-year veteran.

Entering 2009, Knierim had no collegiate experience compared to Talbot's 32 career starts and 1.07 goals against average. If you take out the two worst games of Talbot's career, his GAA drops to 0.80.

The position battle, which Cochran said is now Knierim's to lose, wasn't won because Talbot had a decline in performance — he didn't. It was won because Knierim improved.

"Kyle is as good as any keeper in the country," Cochran said. "But so is Tyler Knierim."

Knierim preserved the victory with two clutch moments last weekend. He made a key save in the 85th minute of the game against Incarnate and saved a penalty kick in the win against St. Edwards.

"That in itself is a statement by the keeper to say, 'You may get by all these guys who are unbelievable, but you still have to beat me,'" Cochran said.

The switch is a testament to how hard Knierim has worked since he came to Truman. He redshirted last season because he rarely would have seen playing time, and he said soccer at Truman was a big jump from his small high school.

But even with the improvement from Knierim, it's still the defenders in front of him who are the keys to the 'Dogs success.

"They've been around the block a couple times, so they know what it takes to be great," Knierim said. "They always know what they're doing and everyone on the team kind of knows that they have the final say."

Athlete of the Week

Demetrius Lavant

Sport: Football
Year: Senior
Hometown: Phoenix, Ariz.

Senior safety Demetrius Lavant recorded a team-high 14 tackles during Truman's 41-31 loss to Fort Hays State University on Saturday. Lavant leads the Bulldogs with 36 tackles this season.

Lavant helps lead secondary

BY BRENT FOSTER
Assistant Sports Editor

Sometimes defenders find the ball, and sometimes the ball seems to find defenders. A little of both seemed to occur for senior safety Demetrius Lavant during Truman's 41-31 loss to Fort Hays State Saturday on night.

Lavant finished the game with a team-high 14 tackles and two pass breakups.

Lavant has been a force in the Bulldog secondary this season. He leads the team with 36 tackles and is second with five pass deflections. He also has an interception and a forced fumble.

"Demetrius plays extremely hard and fast and confident," head coach Aaron Vlcko said. "And when you do that, you put yourself in position to be around the football, and so he did a good job when he got there making the play."

Lavant has seen a lot of opportunities for tackles this season from his spot in the secondary. Fort Hays ran for 250 yards Saturday and

the University of Nebraska-Omaha ran for 256 yards in its victory against Truman on Sept. 12.

Saturday's game was the second big statistical game Lavant has had this season. In the season-opening loss to Minnesota State University-Mankato on Aug. 29, he finished with 13 tackles and a quarterback sack.

"I just try to come to practice every day, try to work hard and do what the coaches tell me," Lavant said. "They put me in the right position."

Last season, Lavant excelled in the secondary for the 'Dogs. He finished fourth on the team with 74 tackles and two interceptions. He also was named Second Team All-MIAA.

Forced turnovers are down this season compared to last season for the Bulldogs. Last year, the Bulldogs forced 28 turnovers. Through four games this season the Bulldogs have forced five turnovers. Part of the decrease has to do with several losses up front and in the secondary. Lavant is

the only one of Truman's top five leading tacklers returning from 2008.

"When we get chances we [aren't] executing on our chances like tipped balls, we don't get them when we should," Lavant said.

With a tough game looming against No. 6 Northwest Missouri State University on Saturday, Lavant and the Bulldog secondary should see more action. Northwest is averaging 143 yards per game rushing and 251 yards passing.

Lavant said the key for the defense would be to force turnovers and keep Northwest off the field.

"We need to force three-and-outs, make some turnovers and get our offense the chance to score," Lavant said.

Vlcko said Lavant has improved this season by knowing the defense better and reacting quicker during his second season at Truman.

"The longer he's been here, the faster he plays," Vlcko said. "And we need him to continue to fly to the football."



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Senior DB Demetrius Lavant, who had 14 tackles Saturday, returns an INT for a touchdown earlier this season.