

Bulldogs relying on solid defense



Freshman forward Nicole Gloor goes for the steal last night against Pittsburg State. The Bulldogs had eight steals on the night. Amy Vicars/Index

Opponents scoring only 62 points per game against Bulldogs

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Lora Westling's connections with Washburn University have helped the women's basketball team inch closer to the top half of the conference standings.

Westling, the women's basketball assistant coach, was a two-time All-MIAA player for the Lady Blues, including the team's national championship season in 2005.

The Lady Blues traditionally are known for their defense — this year is no exception as the team leads the MIAA — and Westling has brought most of their defensive strategy to Truman in her first year.

The results show through 13 conference games this season Truman ranks fourth in the MIAA in scoring defense at 61.6 entering Wednesday night's games.

"We're getting to the point where they want to do the dirty work," Westling said. "They want to do the stuff that really nobody else likes to do, and that's kind of how we got to where we are defensively."

The defense Westling has implemented, with head coach Michael Smith's approval, is man-to-man with a slight twist.

"All of us are responsible for the person with the ball and not just the person we're guarding, so it's more of like a team-oriented defense where everyone is basically participating on on-ball defense," freshman forward Nicole Gloor said. "It's helping without committing."

The defense has helped the Bulldogs hold conference foes to less than their season average in nine of 13 games. Truman held Washburn to its third-lowest tally of the season Dec. 11. Conference leader Northwest Missouri State University scored eight points less than its average despite two overtimes Jan. 8.

Westling calls the defense a "pressure-man" because everyone is not just focused on the person they are guarding. Five Bulldogs have at least 16 steals on the season, including three regular starters and Gloor. Sophomore forward Jennifer Conway leads the team with 20 blocks.

"The reason we can pressure is because there's a backup, and then there's a backup to the backup," Westling said, adding that this part of the defense has not been perfected.

For Smith, part of the improved defense is an emphasis on trust, something he said was not present on the team when he came to Truman four years ago.

"We really try to have trust in one another, not always go find the answer yourself, not just go do it yourself," Smith said.

In practice, Westling often tells the team to "stay solid" on defense. She said going for steals and blocks is not emphasized — Truman ranks in the bottom half

of the conference in both categories — but instead to make sure every shot is contested.

"Don't get caught in a bad position trying to go for steals, just play solid defense and you'll get a steal eventually," Gloor said. "So that's been really key."

Entering Wednesday, Truman's opponents were shooting at a .400 clip overall and .321 from 3-point range, which ranks ninth and fifth in the conference, respectively. However, both figures are worse than what Truman has shot on offense.

"A lot of teams, [defense] is not high on their priority list because they have the firepower to get 80 points a game, 70 points a

game," Westling said. For Truman, it's the opposite. The Bulldogs rank near the bottom of the conference in many offensive categories and they are a slight underdog in point differential. Although junior forward Bri Daniels is 10th in the conference in scoring, she is the only Bulldog who has more than 10 points per game.

The less-than-stellar offense puts more importance on the defense to keep games close.

"That's the heart and soul of our team right now is our defense — our rebounding and our defense — and they go together hand-in-hand," Smith said.

Schmitz records first career win at MVC Open

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Last Saturday at the Missouri Valley College Open in Marshall, Mo., sophomore wrestler Colton Schmitz recorded his first ever college win, finishing first in the 149-pound weight class.

After a first-round bye he won two matches on his way to the championship match against the No. 2 seed Jared Flores of the Northwest Wrestling Club. Schmitz entered the tournament as the No. 1 overall seed in his weight class.

"What makes him unique is kind of like when you're in battle and bullets are flying all around," head coach David Schutter said. "Those that can keep their head survive. Well, when he is out in competition he keeps his head. He reacts like that and doesn't panic and you know finds a way to win."

Schmitz is 16-5 this season in individual matches. He won his first match of the day 4-2 against Oklahoma City University senior Willie Delk. Then, he beat Missouri Baptist University sophomore Esmond Ford 5-2 in the semi final round and topped Flores by the same score in the final. "He had three tough

matches in a row," Schutter said. "Then the finals match he was behind and had gotten hurt. Calls his injury timeout. Didn't look like he was going to be able to go."

Schutter said Schmitz told him he was going to win the match. The decision was then made that Schmitz would go from his feet rather than the bottom position. Schutter said starting from his feet gave Schmitz an upper hand.

"There is so much that goes through your head," Schmitz said. "There is always that little guy in your head telling you, 'Oh you can quit. You can give up. This is too hard. This is too tough.' But I've always had that drive and that mental toughness. Just telling myself, 'Hey, I don't work this hard every day in practice. I don't work this hard all year round to give up here and to lose. I'm going to give it everything that I've got.'"

Last year Schmitz wrestled in the 141 pound weight class. He moved up a class late last season and has stayed in the 149 pound class this year leaving space for freshman Ryan Maus who is better suited to wrestle at 141 pounds.

Schmitz said he had to commit the majority of his free time to making weight before the switch. It was not uncommon for him to devote time

before and after practice to running which, along with a modest diet, burned muscle to keep him at weight. Making the move has allowed him to spend more time in the weight room, which he said he enjoys. He said the move up has helped his academic life by creating more time for school work.

"He wrestled 149 at regionals," Schutter said. "His only matches at 149 were a year ago. So you always have a transition period. These guys are bigger. They're stronger. In high school he was a 140 pounder so he is really testing new waters and he is adjusting well. He is figuring out, 'Man I just can't over wrestle. I can't do this all the time. I can't do that.' Figuring out what works at 149 versus what would have worked at 141. He has made the transition very well."

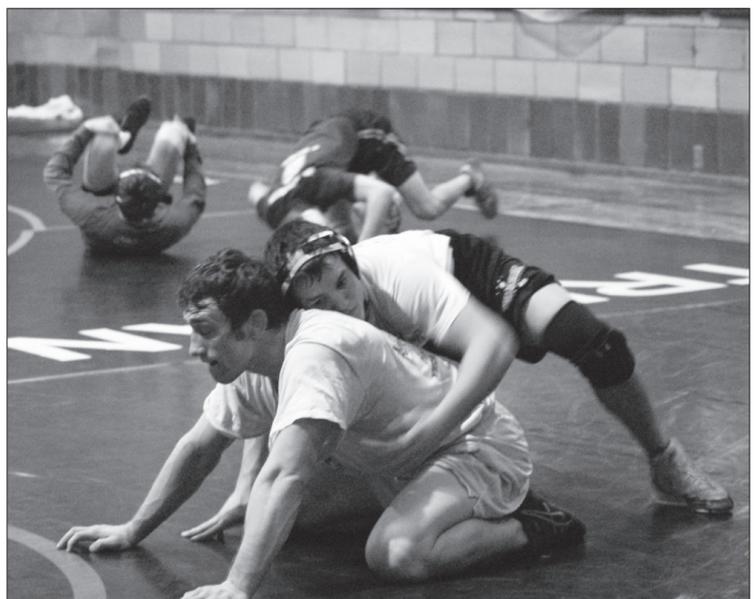
Schutter said Schmitz has done a remarkable job turning from a three-sport high school athlete to a focused one-sport college athlete.

"[Winning] is a great feeling," Schmitz said. "It is hard to explain. You have all that adrenaline going throughout the match and then you finally get that hand raised and walk off the mat just so pumped up inside. I don't know. It's exciting. It's a blast."

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Colton Schmitz

Sport	Weight Class	Year	Hometown
Wrestling	149 pounds	Sophomore	Kirkville, Mo.



Sophomore Colton Schmitz works on starting a match from a standing position during wrestling practice last week. Schmitz has a 16-5 record this year and a career record of 34-19. Krista Goodman/Index

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