Spring season underway

Jack Nicholl/Index
Freshman wide receiver Paul Taylor goes down at practice Wednesday night. The Bulldogs opened spring practice Tuesday.

BY JACK NICHOLL
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Football head coach Gregg Nesbitt held up a sheet of paper in a notebook in his office Wednesday morning. On it was the positives from Tuesday's first spring practice.

After a quick look at the paper, Nesbitt found what he was looking for.

"We threw and caught the ball, we thought, extremely well for the first day of practice," Nesbitt said.

It was a simple note taken from a practice in which the team worked on the basics, including focusing on just a single running play.

"I thought for a couple reasons — I thought the experience of the receiving corps," he added. "They're attacking defenses in their routes, playing with more confidence, with more pace, more speed. The game began to slow down for some of your veterans. And our quarterbacks, particularly in the area of footwork, looked much improved — all three of them."

The positive outlook for the passing game is not unexpected, as it's the receiving corps that return the most players of any offensive unit from the Bulldogs' 4-7 campaign in 2010. Including tight ends, the team returns all but one of its top nine receivers.

Leading the way are wide receivers freshman Dallas Grier and junior Anthony Brown, who both had more than 200 yards receiving last season. Grier also earned an honorable mention All-MIAA.

Also, sophomore tight end Caleb Roberts and wide receivers junior Andy Mundwiller and freshman Paul Taylor all return after their first year of experience as wide receivers. The three combined for more than 200 yards and a touchdown last season.

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>
> **Gregg Nesbitt**
> head coach

Meanwhile, the offensive line lost three starters. Starting quarterback and leading rusher Phil Davis and running back Anton Bernard also will not return.

Quarterback currently is a three-way battle between senior transfer J.B. Clark, sophomore Taylor Breen and freshman Conrad Schottel.

"It's a big advantage to have some experience out there and having that way," sophomore tight end Caleb Roberts said, who was the fourth-leading receiver last season. "There are also quite a few good young players too, so that kind of helps having some experience teaching those guys. It's kind of a good core. We've all been there before, and when it comes down to crunch time we all know what we have to do and what coach expects from us."

The offense will switch from the option running game that suited Davis to a pro-style that is better for the current quarterback candidates.

Nesbitt said the wide receivers' role will change to feature more shorter passes on three-step quarterback drops as well as more screens, to help make up for the inexperienced linemen.

"Certainly the receivers and our ability to spread the ball quickly and efficiently in early downs to allow the offensive line a change to gel a little bit so we can run it when we want to run it and throw it when we want to throw it," Nesbitt said.

Another change will be the role of junior Donald Harvey, who averaged 6.5 yards rushing and 15.4 receiving in 2010. Harvey will switch back to running back where he and sophomore Will Mosquera will split time.

However, Nesbitt said Harvey still could be a "slash" player in the new offense and that he has the ability to match up well with safeties and inside linebackers in the throwing game.

"We're going to be able to get the ball in people's hands very quick," Harvey said. "They're spreading everything out, so naturally when you spread everything out in football it allows people to make plays as it is. ... I think we're still hungry, because even though we improved a lot we still didn't reach our potential."

Rotkvich tosses her first one-hitter

BY WILL EVANS
Staff Reporter

Junior pitcher Ashley Rotkvich's mentality this season has been to "own" and control her position whenever she steps out on the mound. Rotkvich did just that and more as she threw her first career one-hitter in a 9-0 win against the Southwest Baptist Bearcats in the MIAA Southwest Crossover finale last Sunday.

Head coach Erin Brown said Rotkvich's strength consistently has been her ability to keep the ball low and get batters off balance.

Rotkvich said she has never been a strikeout pitcher. She said her strengths lie in her ability to pitch low and create opportunities for outs by causing contact on the ball to result in mostly ground balls or pop-flys.

She kept the ball low against the Bearcats, but her ability to get strikes within the first few pitches really helped Rotkvich and the rest of the Bulldogs' defense dominate the other team during the whole game.

"I was able to hit all my spots and get ahead [of the count]," Rotkvich said.

Brown said she also noticed how frequently and successfully Rotkvich worked ahead of the batters.

"The percentage of batters that she got ahead on was really high so she had a first or second pitch strike right away, and when you can do that as a pitcher, statistically speaking, you have a much higher chance of getting those batters out than if you're behind in the count," Brown said. "Rotkvich's pitch per batter was really low, and when you are not pitching as often, the pitcher doesn't get tired as easily. And the batters don't have as much time to adjust to the pitches and get used to the pitcher."

> "Rotkvich was so close to pitching a no-hitter — the ball rolled off the end of the bat and went like five feet."
>
> **Erin Brown**
> head coach

Up until the final inning, it appeared as though Rotkvich would finish the game with a no-hitter having put just three baserunners on via walks in the first six innings. After the first batter was retired, the next batter got the only hit of the game for SBU.

"Rotkvich was so close to pitching a no-hitter — the ball rolled off the end of the bat and went like five feet," Brown said.

Rotkvich's performance also accompanied the Truman softball team's play defensively and offensively.

"They made a couple of outstanding plays," Brown said. "Our shortstop [senior] Alex Weber made a double play to end the game. Our outfielders made some great plays. They really did a good job of keeping people off the base and it was mostly an errorless game."

The Bulldogs' nine runs also gave Rotkvich the confidence and patience she needed to execute her pitches, relieving her of the need to feel like she needed to force strikes and try to rush pitches.

"The team scored one run in the first inning and two more in the third, the sixth inning we scored four runs and scored a few more in the seventh," Brown said. "Those runs just gave the pitcher more confidence to throw her pitches and not worry about what if something happens, or what if this batter scores, and just concentrate on making her pitches count, which obviously she did."

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Ashley Rotkvich

Sport	Position	Year	Hometown
Softball	Pitcher	Junior	Crestwood, Ill.

Joyce Wong/Index
Junior pitcher Ashley Rotkvich brings the ball to the plate last week against Maryville University. Rotkvich is 3-4 with a 3.87 ERA this season.

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