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Junior guard E.J. Hicks prepares to pass in practice Monday as assistant basketball coach Todd Lorensen looks on. Hicks is one of the Bulldogs' leading scorers and rebounders this season. Last year, Hicks averaged nine points and four rebounds per game at Des Moines Area Community College.

Manning the point

Junior transfer E.J. Hicks is one of the Bulldogs' leaders in several statistical categories after almost having the start of his Truman basketball career postponed before it ever began

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The mens basketball team started the regular season with five players on the roster who have two or more years of college experience. Junior guard E.J. Hicks almost wasn't one of them.

Hicks, who is in the top five for the Bulldog's in made field goals, points and rebounds, injured his knee during a pre-season practice and said his status for the 2011-12 season was uncertain immediately following the injury.

"I had a really huge, season-threatening injury — tore my LCL," Hicks said. "I was out for a little over a month with that. I was a little scared just for the season, especially having a really big impact on the team."

Hicks said he worked hard to rehabilitate his knee and with the help of Doug Cooper, Truman Certified Athletic Trainer, he was able to get ready for the start of the Bulldog's season. Despite only starting two of the first nine

games, Hicks has played the fourth most minutes of any Bulldog and is averaging 21.5 minutes per game. Head coach Matt Woodley said Hicks did not start the first six games of the season, because of his knee.

In the team's first game of the regular season against Abilene Christian University [Texas], Hicks played 20 minutes and had 10 points, tying junior guard Tom Norton for the second highest point total of any Bulldog during the game.

Hicks played basketball at the community college level during the first two years of his career, but Truman is the first NCAA school he has played for. Woodley said several Div. II schools recruited Hicks while he was still in junior college and what makes E.J. a good fit for Truman is he enjoys playing on the ball.

"I thought we needed a really good guard," Woodley said. "I've known E.J. for a long time him being from Davenport [Iowa], and I grew up in Davenport. His maturity, his age, you know he is already older than most guys. He's already in his fourth year of college. I thought he

was different than most guys we had already signed. He is a little bit more athletic, good size, can score, can probably play multiple guard positions."

During only one of his first seven games, Hicks shot below 42 percent from the floor and shot better than 50 percent in four of those games. Hicks currently is third on the team in scoring averaging 10.4 points per game. After six games, he was shooting more than 77 percent from the free-throw line, missing four of the 18 shots he has been awarded.

Last year, the 'Dogs shot 69 percent from the line as a team. Only two guards on the 2010-11 roster had a free-throw percentage equal to or greater than Hicks's current mark. One of those guards is sophomore Pat Sodemann, who took a medical redshirt this year after the Bulldogs last preseason game to rest a recently operated-on shoulder.

This season, Truman returned two of last season's top five rebounders and senior center Vesko Filchev is the only player to return who ranked in the top three. This season, Hicks has 29 total

rebounds and is averaging 3.6 per game making him fifth on the team overall. He is third in defensive rebounding behind freshman Mike Carlson and sophomore Isaac Gardner.

Carlson said he is glad to have Hicks on his team, because he would hate to play against him.

"As far as rebounding goes he is just always in there," Carlson said. "He has a nose for the ball. He has great hands. He's just been able to get in there and dig out some balls that probably other guys could not have got."

Hicks said that when he started at Truman he wasn't sure whether he would be playing off guard or point guard, but he said he has enjoyed bringing the ball up the floor.

"Point guard is one of the biggest roles on the team for sure," Hicks said. "Coach depends on you a lot to control the team. He comes to you when something goes bad. It's just a lot of roles with being a point guard, but me having that past experience playing I didn't mind taking that role."

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