

Men clinch MIAA tournament bid

BY SAM SHERMAN
Sports Editor
index.sportseditor@gmail.com

The Bulldog men's basketball team bounced back from an 81-71 senior night loss Thursday to the Lindenwood University Lions to pick up an 81-74 victory Saturday against the Lincoln University Blue Tigers as they fight to remain healthy for the MIAA tournament.

Head coach Matt Woodley said the game Thursday was one of the first games this season where his team was clearly outmatched on the court. He said the experience the Lions had on the court gave them the ultimate advantage in the Bulldog loss.

"Of all the team's we've played, I thought they were the only team really to outplay us," Woodley said. "They're a veteran team, and one thing veteran teams always do is they make you pay for every mistake that you make."

The game was marked offensively for the Bulldogs by junior guard Isaac Gardner's outside shot. As Woodley gave Gardner the green light to fire at will from three-point range, he hit four of 10 shots from beyond the arc, finishing with 12 points and forcing the Lions' defense to focus a majority of their efforts on making sure Gardner stayed covered.

Woodley said Gardner's ability from the three-point line comes from his athleticism, and he said he has no problem with any of the shots Gardner takes.

"When you coach a player like Isaac [Gardner] and his ability to shoot the ball so well, you can't try and harness that in — you just have to let him go," Woodley said. "The one thing that Isaac's done is he's hard to guard because he moves and he's a good athlete and he has good size."

The Bulldogs were led offensively by junior forward Mike Carlson who finished the game with 18 points, while sophomore guard Seth Jackson finished with 16, shooting 70 percent in the loss to the Lions.

Contrary to offensive trends this season, senior guard Tom Norton finished with five points, hitting one of eight shots from the field. Woodley said Norton's offensive struggles recently have pushed him into more of a facilitation role on offense, and Norton finished the night with six assists, a team-high.

The Bulldogs' trip to Jefferson City, Mo. on Saturday gave the Bulldogs a boost that Woodley said they desperately needed as it allowed them to clinch a tournament bid, and gave them their sixth conference victory of the season and moved them to 9-15 for the season.

The 'Dogs started off slow, losing 47-36 at halftime, but picked up after the intermission, with help from Jackson, who finished with a career-high 26 points as the Bulldogs went on a 15-7 run to take the game from the Tigers.

"Our guys were hurt after Thursday's game,"

Woodley said. "We struggled a little bit early, I think we were just trying too hard early on Saturday. Then we finally settled in and played, and it looked like the team that we've grown accustomed to."

Gardner said the allure of a possible tournament berth allowed the Bulldogs to overcome the adversity they faced in the first half to pick up the win.

"We knew that we still had a really good chance of playing in Kansas City," Gardner said. "I think everyone was really focused on Saturday. We started out kind of slow but then I thought we stuck together as a team and fought through it. The win was really good for us."

Even though the team has already clinched a spot in the MIAA tournament, Woodley said the last two games of the season, against Central Missouri yesterday and Northwest Missouri State University Saturday are much-needed wins as it could bump their tournament seed up, giving them an easier road during the post-season.

He said the team needs a confidence boost after multiple players have gone down with injuries like sophomore forward Tyler Anderson, and the team has struggled to make up for it.

"We're still trying to improve our seed because there's a lot of opportunities out there depending on what other teams do," Woodley said. "I just want to continue to improve and I'd like to get another signature win on the road this year."

Should the Bulldogs win their last two games, there's a possibility that their first game of the tournament could be played at Pershing.

Gardner said this possibility is providing motivation for the team as they near the finish line.

"If the stars align just right, and we take care of business these last two games, we could host a game," Gardner said. "I know that everyone on the team is pretty focused on these last two games and trying to win both of them."

Read about the men's and women's games against Central Missouri Wednesday online at <http://tmn.truman.edu/theindex>



Above, Freshman guard Cole Myers takes a shot Thursday against Lindenwood University. The Bulldogs lost 81-71 to the Lions at Pershing Arena.



Below, Junior guard Isaac Gardner, left, and senior guard Matt Patterson watch a play unfold Thursday night. Gardner made four of his 10 three-point shots.

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