

SHERMAN | Editor questions current trend of student apathy surrounding Truman State athletics

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women's basketball team, the best three-point shooting team across the country, notch win after win with the only cheers coming from parents and the pep band, and they still finished undefeated in Pershing Arena this season for the first time in school history.

I've seen last-second shots, late fourth quarter drives and mind-numbing comebacks. I've seen teams make meteoric progress from the failure that once plagued Bulldog athletics. There are athletes on this campus who shine in purple and white, whose names — on pretty much any other campus in the nation — would be synonymous with athletic success. These same athletes are the ones who thank me profusely for even interviewing them for a story and giving their teams a bit of recognition.

How can this trend of empty bleachers and silent crowds be stopped? The answer always has escaped me. I've asked coaches and players in interviews and students on campus, and the best response came from head football coach Gregg Nesbitt. He told me that winning sows support, a very logical answer. However, since then, this logic seems to be the beginning of the ultimate catch-22.

If a team can't gain campus support without winning, but finds it hard to win in front of empty stands, how can Truman students truthfully denounce the Bulldogs? Even when the 'Dogs win, which, contrary to popular belief, is a common occurrence these days, they still don't gain an audience.

Sure, Div. II athletics don't offer the same electric environ-

ment as major Div. I programs, but why not? Good basketball is good basketball, regardless of whether the highlights are going to be on ESPN the next day. Athletic prowess shouldn't be determined by national attention anyway.

At my high school, the gym was packed for basketball games and if any Kickapoo High School student wore a dreaded Glendale High School shirt to school, it would be equivalent to a national anthem singer starting off their rendition of the ode to our nation with "O Canada!" Yet, a quick walk around campus will show students sporting the Northwest Missouri State Bearcat or Central Missouri Mule on their chests, schools that any Truman sports fan immediately would scoff at.

I've worked my hardest to bring campus-wide recognition to the athletes who put in an inordinate amount of effort into succeeding on a campus lacking anything resembling school pride. The million-dollar question is when will this vicious cycle of athletes fighting to remain successful without any type of school support end?

The answer lies in the empty space on the back windshield of that homebound car Friday afternoon. It starts with a visible sense of Truman pride on this campus, a Truman Bulldog on the back of your car or a purple shirt walking around campus. Because, while it's true that winning breeds support, it's also true that support breeds success, and the only way to break this trend is to start taking a sense of pride in the fact that you are a Truman Bulldog.



Adam Antor/Index

The Truman Bulldogs huddle on the court during their game Tuesday against the SBU Bearcats. The MIAA tournament win extended the Bulldogs school record 16-game winning streak in Pershing Arena.

WOMEN | 'Dogs pick up first postseason win since the 2007-2008 season

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triples. McHenry, the team's leading scorer, led in points and rebounds during the first half, scoring 10 and collecting five off the boards. She finished the game with 21 points and 10 rebounds. After the game, McHenry said she approached this MIAA tournament game like any other.

"We were just excited to be there and have the chance," McHenry said. "It's definitely a different atmosphere to play in so we have to prepare for that. Other than that, it's another game and it's the most important game of the year."

Truman gave up nine turnovers as the Bearcats gave eight of their own possessions away during the first half. The 'Dogs collected nine points off turnovers during the first half, whereas Southwest Baptist made two points off turnovers.

Going into the half, the Bull-

dogs kept a four-point lead against the Bearcats. The Truman women began the second half with possession and Conway scored a left-handed layup within the first 15 seconds. The next Bulldog possession saw the same thing from Conway and the 'Dogs jumped out to an eight point lead.

The Bearcats kept the game close throughout. For a three-minute span, the Bulldogs and Bearcats traded six baskets in a row. Truman quickly pulled ahead because of tough play, drawing four team fouls within the first eight minutes. With 11 minutes to go, the Bulldogs found themselves up 48-34.

During the final four minutes, Southwest Baptist pulled the game back within three points down 52-49. Head coach Michael Smith said it was at this point that he saw an opportunity to calm down his players.

"It felt like the momentum was in their favor, so obviously I was just trying to calm the kids down," Smith said. "[I wanted] to get more rotations in there. I sent two subs that I needed to get in there that I thought were very vital for us on the defensive end."

After the timeout, it was all Bulldogs as they went on to make five out of six free throws to secure the victory 65-56.

With the win against the Bearcats Tuesday, Truman moves on to face the fourth seed Emporia State University in Kansas City, Mo., during the second round of the MIAA tournament.

Emporia State was the team responsible for the Bulldogs' quick exit from the MIAA tournament last season, downing Truman 64-63 on a last-second three point shot. The team's play Friday at 2:15 p.m. at the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium.

WASHBURN | Junior pitcher Hannah Washburn excels despite lack of formal pitching training

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steady diet of changeups and curveballs, senior catcher Meredith Kusky said Washburn is a tough pitcher to hit.

Kusky said Washburn brings more than just a steady arm to the pitching staff this year. Kusky said Washburn is confident about her abilities and has excellent command of the strike zone, which enables Kusky to call games more effectively during crucial situations.

"[Washburn] hits all of her spots all of the time," Kusky said. "If I know a hitter has a weakness, I'm positive she'll put it right where I want it and that makes it easy to call a game. She has total control and confidence in her pitches and that sets the tone for the rest of us. We play to win and we know we can win with her [on the mound]."

While on the mound, Washburn said her confidence comes from experience. Washburn began playing softball when she was 9 years old. Since then, Washburn said she has worked hard to develop her game to the level she is at now, but unlike most pitchers, Kusky said Washburn taught herself how to pitch.

"When she was younger, she'd go to camps and try and pick up things from others and now she is a starting Div. II pitcher," Kusky said. "That's insane."

Washburn said her experience is a major asset at the collegiate level because she knows what questions to ask and what to expect during the course of a season. Fellow newcomer, freshman pitcher Kindra Henze, said Washburn's experience also helps shape her mental toughness on the mound.

"Washburn works hard and takes time to do little things the right way," Henze said. "She is always positive, always confident and always ready to go. Against the 15th ranked team in the nation she stayed composed and held them to one earned run on four hits. She has a

WASHBURN ON THE MOUND

Record: 4-2

Complete Games: 3

ERA: 2.08

Strikeouts: 38

Batting Average Against: 190

Innings Pitched: 33.2



lot of movement on her pitches and she has really become a leader for us."

Washburn said her confidence is in her blood because she was taught by her parents to stay confident, calm and collected while pitching. Washburn said her father always told her never to get too confident or too downtrodden during a game and not to get frustrated when she was down. Washburn said while she is confident on the mound there still is one pitch she has yet to fully command.

"My drop ball is my biggest weakness," Washburn said. "I just started learning it this year and I'm definitely not confident in it right now, but having a pitch that complements my rise ball really frustrates opposing hitters so I am working hard every day on developing it."

Kusky said she has only called on the drop ball a total of five times this season but so far the pitch has had success.

Washburn said she gave Kusky a funny look the first time she called for the pitch but threw it anyway. She said she threw it perfectly and the batter grounded out and without thinking she immediately began jumping up and down on the mound in celebration. Kusky said the whole bench started laughing.

Kusky said Washburn is a talented pitcher who takes a lot of stress off of the rest of the team and can be just as dominant through the rest of the season as she has been so far. Kusky said the entire team feeds off of Washburn's confidence and the Bulldogs are excited for what she will bring them throughout 2013.

MARINO | Senior utility player provides good attitude, offense to Bulldog roster

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"He is a guy where, in the past, he has always tried to go out and get the ball when he's hitting," Davis said. "That gets rid of all the weight-training and everything you've done to build your legs and your core up. He's allowed the ball to get to him a little bit better and that's translated into being able to hit the ball up the middle and up the side better."

Being able to hit the ball to the opposite field requires patience in a batter, and so far this season, Marino has shown he can be patient at the plate.

Senior infielder Jordan Howe said Marino's attitude and approach toward the game of baseball makes him a valuable teammate to have.

"It helps when you've got a guy like that to show up to our five in the morning practices," Howe said. "You know you're going to have fun with him. Being another fellow infielder with him in his second year, we really benefit from working with each other because we do a lot of drills and mechanics together."

So far this season, Howe and Marino have played with each other in all but the first game, where Marino was a designated hitter.

The next time Bulldogs fans can see Marino in action will be at 1 p.m. Tuesday, March 12 as the Bulldogs are slated to face the Maryville University Saints.

The next road game will be today against the University of Central Missouri. Last year, Marino only got a hit during two at bats against the Mules, but, with his larger role in the lineup this season, he will be seeing more action at the plate this time around.

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