

Baseball finishes 2-1 over weekend

BY RACHEL STEINHOFF
Staff Reporter

After finishing 1-2 during opening weekend, the Truman State baseball team continued its non-conference play with a road trip to the eastern side of the GLVC. Truman began and ended the roadtrip at the University of Southern Indiana and then a short trip to Saint Joseph's College for a Saturday face-off.

The weekend in Indiana began with a meeting against the No. 23 Southern Indiana Screaming Eagles. The game featured a matchup between the previous two Midwest Region Champions, with Truman owning the 2015 title and Southern Indiana claiming the championship during 2014.

Head Coach Dan Davis said the team was aware of the talent it would be facing early during the year and said his players met the challenge with enthusiasm. Davis said his team strives to be one of the best in the country, so the players look forward to going up against some of the country's top competition. He said he thinks a historic program such as USI was a great challenge for his team, and the high level of competition did not disappoint.

During the game, Truman faced a deficit of 7 runs against the Screaming Eagles. After establishing a 4-2 lead during the third, the tables turned with Truman falling behind 13-6 after four innings. The 'Dogs scored three during the sixth inning, and two during the seventh and eighth innings to tie the game at 13 runs each. The game, which took more than four hours, eventually required additional innings and the Screaming Eagles claimed a 14-13 victory during the bottom of the 11th. The game featured 27 runs scored, 33 hits and 10 different pitchers. Although the 'Dogs almost overcame the seven-run difference, the Bulldogs stranded baserunners and committed five errors on the field.

Davis said limiting errors and sharpening play on defense could be the difference for the Bulldogs during close games like the one against USI. Davis said not being able to get outside to practice has been hard on the defensive aspect of Truman's game, but he said he thinks his team is getting more comfortable and showing a little more improvement every game.

Junior infielder Nick Agliolo led the Bulldogs Friday by posting four hits on the afternoon, while freshman outfielder Mason King added 2 hits, 2 RBIs and 3 runs. With King and Agliolo, who is a transfer, Davis said the team has been grateful to get production from new faces this season. Davis said he thinks they, along with the other newcomers, have done a great job adjusting to the team.

"Our biggest thing when we go out recruiting is that we look for guys who play the game the way we want them to and fit into the mold of what we think is a Bulldog baseball player," Davis said. "It's easy for them to blend right in with our program, and we've been really lucky to get the right guys who have been able to do that. It's fun to watch."

There was no time to dwell on Friday's loss because Truman moved on to Rensselaer, Indiana, for a Saturday afternoon match against the Saint Joseph's Pumas.

Another slow start put the Bulldogs behind, and the 'Dogs spent most of the afternoon playing catch-up. Truman trailed almost the entire game, falling behind 4-0 after the first inning and 6-4 after 3 innings. Truman didn't score another run until the seventh inning.

The rally began with King's base hit, followed by an RBI from Agliolo. Junior outfielder Dave Gambino then scored Agliolo and led the way for the rest of the

Big Bats

Offensive totals from Truman baseball's weekend road trip

Hits: 38
Runs: 27
RBIs: 23

Bulldog lineup. Junior catcher Jason Priest, sophomore first baseman Brendan Trimble, and senior third baseman Chris Iliopoulos closed the inning with base hits and two more runs, which pulled the 'Dogs within one, trailing 9-8 heading into the eighth. The Pumas did not score another run for the remainder of the game and the top of the Truman lineup notched three more runs. Sophomore pitcher Alex Hoffmann closed the game, earning his first win of the year.

This marked the third straight game Truman has fallen behind by more than five runs, but caught back up.

Davis said so far this season, the team's resilience has been one of the biggest positives.

"We've been able to take advantage of mistakes, and we've just seen a lot about the character of our team," Davis said. "Our guys don't give up and have shown a lot of fight. This is awesome to see because in baseball there is no time limit. If you have an out left, you have an opportunity to win."

Davis said he was proud of how his team found a way to come back and tie or win those games, especially because they were down by so many runs.

Trimble paced this Bulldog comeback with three hits and three RBIs during his five at-bats. Senior catcher Joey Gardner added another three hits and one RBI. Agliolo tallied two hits and one RBI on the day as well. Overall, the top of the lineup featured the first six batters going 13-28 at the plate for an average of .464.

Davis said he was confident going into this year that his offense could be special, and he said he feels really lucky to have a deep and talented roster.

"We've got a great lineup," Davis said. "I mean there's even guys on the bench who should be playing but, with as good as our lineup is, it's tough to break into it."

Gardner said the comeback wins build confidence looking ahead. Gardner said his team wasn't afraid of a deficit or pressure filled situation.

"Those come-back wins showed that we have a lot of fight until the very end of the game," Gardner said. "We grew as a team, and it really opened our eyes to our capabilities if we never give up."

Agliolo said he agreed the team's offense will be tough this year and good enough to keep Truman in games like it did this weekend. He said he knew from the start of the season there wouldn't be a struggle from an offensive standpoint. Agliolo said his team members know they are capable of scoring runs, and they showed it this weekend.

Agliolo said his success at the plate comes from focusing on the task at hand, whether that's moving runners or simply getting on base to create momentum. Agliolo said he was fortunate for his good weekend at the plate, but he said he was happier he was able to help the team get the job done.

After these at-bat performances at the start of the road trip, Sunday's game was played at a different pace. In a rematch of Friday's events, Truman evened its season record with Southern Indiana, earning a 3-2 win in the road trip finale. Instead of production from the offense, the game featured a pitchers' duel.

After four scoreless innings, USI took a 1-0 lead that stood until the seventh. With two outs during the inning, Trimble's base hit eventually brought him in as the tying run after a throwing error by USI's third baseman.

With an even score, the 'Dogs carried their momentum into the eighth. A hit by Gardner, a sacrifice fly by King, and two USI errors put Truman on top 3-1 in the bottom of the eighth. The Bulldogs escaped the bottom half of the inning with bases loaded, but did not produce during the ninth, which left the Screaming Eagles within striking distance. With Bulldog sophomore pitcher Peter Young on the mound, USI narrowed the gap to one run. Young eventually struck out the cleanup hitter for his first save of the year with a runner on third. Sophomore pitcher Nate Lukas earned his first win of the year for Truman, having thrown a 1.29 ERA through seven innings.

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-Head Coach Dan Davis

Bulldog baseball now is preparing for its home opener and doubleheader against Bemidji State University Friday. After opening with seven road games, the 'Dogs have the opportunity to play 10 straight games at Bulldog Baseball Park in front of a home crowd, with their Kirksville debut.

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