Football tackles St. Joseph's Pumas

The Truman State football team defeated the St. Joseph's College Pumas 10-3 last Saturday. The 'Dogs, who are now 5-5 on the season, held St. Joseph's to 102 yards on the ground. They are now tied with the Missouri University of Science and Technology Miners for third place in the GLVC. The Bulldogs' upcoming game against McKendree University will decide second place in the GLVC.

HENRY JANSSEN
Staff Reporter

The Bulldog football team improved its record to 5-5 Saturday at Stokes Stadium with a 10-3 win against the St. Joseph's College Pumas. Truman is now tied with the Missouri University of Science and Technology for third place in the GLVC standings with a 4-3 conference record. With a victory last week, the University of Indianapolis clinched the conference title for the fourth consecutive year, but a win this weekend against McKendree University would guarantee the 'Dogs will get at least a share of second place in the conference.

The game's only touchdown came from a 1-yard carry by redshirt junior running back A.J. Hartfield. Hartfield led the 'Dogs in rushing with 88 yards on 18 carries, his highest rushing total of the season. Hartfield said he has recovered from a heel injury sustained during the game against Wayne State University Sept. 12.

"I feel like we did just enough to win the game, as far as offense goes," Hartfield said. "We did well in our running game approach, and passes that needed to be made were made."

Redshirt freshman quarterback Randy Schroeder passed for 173 yards, completing 18 of his 33 attempts. Junior Joey Schenck was the Bulldogs' leading wide receiver with seven catches for 75 yards. The Bulldogs finished with 253 yards of offense and no turnovers.

Hartfield said Schroeder has continued to improve since stepping into the starting quarterback position.

"He's on a steady come-up, we like that a lot," Hartfield said. "A lot depends on how fast he's going to progress for this next year coming up. We can see that he's improving, it's only a question of how fast he makes that jump."

In the defensive aspect of the game, the Bulldogs allowed 335 yards of offense, 102 yards on the ground and 233 in the air. Sophomore defensive back Ben Chaney led Truman in tackles with 11. Junior defensive back T.J. Fine and redshirt freshman linebacker Kade Young each had 10 tackles. Sophomore defensive back JD Hurd had an interception for the Bulldogs and senior defensive lineman Devin Gillespie recorded a sack.

Wade Burtron, St. Joseph's redshirt junior quarterback, went 34-for-43 in passing with one interception. Burtron also gained 51 yards on 15 attempts. Although Burtron had a high completion percentage, Truman Head Coach Gregg Nesbitt said this was part of the Bulldogs' defensive plan last week during practice.

"Our guys executed the game plan," Nesbitt said. "There's nobody excited about quick passes, and Burtron's 15-of-16 in the first half was only for about 100 yards. We're forcing you to throw the football where we want it to be thrown, then it's a rallying point. It's not 1-on-1, it becomes 2-on-1, 3-on-1. We're just as physical as you can be to the point where their receivers say, 'Coach, there's got to be an easier way to make 5 yards.' I thought that the defensive game plan was excellent."

The Pumas rushed for 102 yards on 39 attempts, averaging just 3.1 yards per play, the fewest since the 'Dogs held the William Jewell Cardinals to 35 rushing yards two weeks ago.

Nesbitt said the second half of this season has been a great start to the offseason period that begins Sunday. The Bulldogs began with a 1-4 record, and they now have won four of their last five games.

"We've been running uphill all season to get to where we are competitively, so I'm very proud for these guys," Nesbitt said. "Our team in general, it's such a close-knit locker room. It's evident in the way they prepare each week. All I can tell you is that I'll be a sad guy on Sunday. It's a privilege. I enjoy coming in each day to work with these guys."

Senior defensive lineman Dominic Greenlee said he agreed with Nesbitt that the Bulldogs' preparation has been much better, particularly against the Pumas.

Saturday marked the first time the Bulldogs have defeated the Pumas since entering the GLVC. St. Joseph's came to Kirksville during 2013 and beat Truman 6-3. Last year, the Bulldogs went to Rensselaer, Indiana, for their final game of the season and fell 35-9.

"Our mental preparation before the game was just amazing this week, we had incredible focus," Greenlee said. "I guess there was just something in the air. That, and the past two years, they beat us. We feel like that 6-3 game two years ago was ours to be won, and last year they had a total lack of sportsmanship. It left a bad taste in our mouth, and we wanted to hand it to them this game, as far as defense goes. We just knew that they had it coming this time."

The Bulldogs will play their final game of the season and celebrate Senior Day 1 p.m. Saturday against McKendree University at Stokes Stadium.

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