

Baseball opens season with rough weekend

BY JEREMY JACOB
Staff Writer

The Truman State University baseball team opened its season last weekend looking to start 2017 on a positive note and recover from a 20-30 record last spring.

Instead, the Bulldogs faced a rocky start as they dropped three of their first four games. Despite its opening weekend record, head coach Dan Davis said he expects the team's offense and defense to be as reliable as they have been in previous years. Davis said the biggest issue for the team will be the challenge facing the pitching staff — particularly the starting rotation.

"We're not asking them to throw shutouts every day," Davis said. "We're just asking them to be consistent."

Last season, the Bulldogs accumulated a 5.94 ERA that ranked 13th out of 16 in the GLVC. None of their starters managed to reach 70 innings in 2016 — the maximum was 60.1 innings thrown by former GLVC freshman of the year, junior Kent Frantz. The 'Dogs found themselves playing catch-up most of the time, as the season box scores showed the 'Dogs were outscored 161-84 in the first three innings.

Davis said this year's team has a legitimate shot at rising back to prominence like the 2015 Bulldogs, who advanced past the regional round of the national tournament. That team featured six members of the All-GLVC team, including starting pitchers Frantz and alum Cody Gardner. In the Bulldogs' 2015 World Series run, each member of the Bulldog rotation threw a substantial and even chunk of innings, each throwing at least 75 innings — Gardner threw 112, alumni Mark Roberts with 81, Frantz with 80.2 and senior Alex Hoffmann with 76.2 — allowing the team to outscore opponents 137-83 in the first three innings.

Davis said the starters are capable of lasting longer in games if they stay focused and buy into the game plan — consistently throwing strikes to avoid walking batters. He said returning upperclassmen like Frantz and Hoffmann are key to accomplishing this, once again taking some of the pressure off the newcomers.

"We fully expect the returners to eat up the bulk of the innings," Davis said.

Davis said a winning season — which would be the sixth in program history and second in three years — is possible if the lineup can supplement the steady contributions he expects out of the offense this year. Davis said he will be able to write senior middle infielder Nick Agliolo and senior first baseman Dave Gambino into the lineup for the majority of the season.

Agliolo is coming off a season where he led the team in batting average, on base percentage, slugging percentage, hits, RBIs and runs — contributing to his inclusion on the 2016 All-Midwest region team. Gambino enters his fifth season overall in the program, only three shy of being the eighth Bulldog ever to have at least 100 RBIs and seven shy of being the ninth Bulldog ever to have at least 250 total bases. The National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association preseason poll projects Gambino to end his career with a selection to the All-Midwest region team.

Besides working closely with the team's pitchers, Davis said he also works with the base runners along with second year assistant coach and former Bulldog shortstop Zak Larkin.

Larkin echoed Davis' emphasis on base running and said it's the brand of Bulldog baseball they want to present on the field for every game. Larkin said Davis has been preaching the importance of not relying on the three-run home run and applying constant pressure on the opposing defense.



Photo by Damian Soane/TMN

Members of the Truman baseball team watch from the dugout last spring. Truman opened the 2017 season in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, last weekend.

Larkin said the pitching rotation can relieve some of the pressure on the offense by consistently posting scoreless innings. Referencing his time on the 2015 team, he said the rotation continually pitching six or seven productive innings was a big reason for the team's success that season.

"This rotation has the potential to be better than that rotation in 2015," Larkin said.

Just like the 2015 rotation, Larkin said the 2017 edition of the Bulldog bullpen should be reliable by virtue of the collection of returners like Frantz and Hoffmann and talented newcomers like freshman Rian Markes, who has completely bought into the team's game plan of attacking hitters. Their receptiveness to instruction and brimming talent has Larkin excited, he said.

Frantz was a member of that 2015 rotation. Like many of his teammates, his winning 2015 campaign was followed by a less stellar 2016 season. Frantz, however, said he has the utmost confidence that the starters and team will bounce back.

"I have complete confidence in anybody we can put on the mound," Frantz said.

Truman will look to bounce back from opening weekend with another four-game roadtrip this weekend. The 'Dogs will head to Joplin, Missouri, for double headers at 1 and 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday against Missouri Southern State University.

Softball starts play against nation's top ranked teams

BY STEPHANIE HULETT
Staff Writer

Despite graduating key players in the pitching circle, Truman State University softball opened its season last weekend in Alabama with a 1-3 record against some of the nation's top contenders. The Bulldogs opened 2017 against No. 1 ranked 2016 defending National Champions, University of North Alabama. Truman led 5-4 until North Alabama hit a three-run walkoff homerun to win the game 7-4. The 'Dogs also fell to University of West Alabama and Delta State University but came out victorious with a score of 2-1 in 8 innings to Mississippi College.

Head coach Erin Brown said the Bulldogs are optimistic about the potential of this season, but to achieve their goals in post-season, the team must focus on the detailed process of day-to-day improvement to get the finished product they desire. Brown said every team's goal should be to win a National Championship, but to get there they must establish themselves as a top-16 team in super regionals and get the bid to the first regional round of the NCAA championship bracket.

The 'Dogs have a few players on the must-watch list this season that have the potential to propel them toward these goals. Sophomore outfielder Christa Reisinger was First Team All Conference and Freshman of the Year in the GLVC in 2016. She was also a finalist for the National Fastpitch Coaches Association Freshman of the Year and continued to attract attention as one of 50 players on the 2017 Player of the Year watchlist for this season, according to the NFCSA. Senior catcher Lex Van Nostrand is another Bulldog returner who will be a key component in purple and white.

Brown said her team also has some newcomers fighting for playing time, among them freshman pitcher Alyssa Hajduk, who Brown said is adjusting well to the college level and will be a good option for the 'Dogs on the mound.

Kirkville winters are not very helpful for outdoor spring sports because of limited outdoor practice time. Brown said it was especially frustrating for the hitters who are unable to see where the ball is going and practice making adjustments in batting cages. Brown said this disadvantage does give the women a little extra edge and urgency once season rolls around.

"There's definitely an advantage of being able to get outside from the beginning like the teams from Alabama or Texas because you are limited with what you can do inside with defense specifically and scrimmaging," Brown said. "I will say, the girls are eager to play ... I don't know if that exists other places down south because they've been out there since day one."

Junior infielder Jamie Fowle said this season is even more frustrating because the team is unable to use outdoor facilities because of the construction going on at Stokes Stadium. Fowle said the team can usually use the turf at Stokes, which is more winter-friendly than the dirt at Bulldog Softball Park, but lacked that option this year.

Fowle said the squad has focused a lot this offseason on fitness levels and overall conditioning to be more versatile on the field. She said the team trains with their goals in mind and has been working a lot on communication. Fowle said they have new pitchers for the first time in about four years, and also some new players in other key positions — working on this communication has been key in preparing for those changes this season.

As a freshman, Hajduk said playing at the collegiate level has forced her to make adjustments to her work ethic and time management. She said everyone works on strengthening certain aspects of their game in addition to the team workouts and goals for the season.

Truman softball travels to Hendersonville, Tennessee, this weekend, Feb. 17 and 18, for double header action each day. The 'Dogs will face Saginaw Valley State University and Ohio Dominican University Saturday then battle Trevecca Nazarene University and Kentucky Wesleyan College Sunday.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Softball

- 2/17 2 p.m. vs. Saginaw Valley State
Hendersonville, Tenn.
- 2/18 Noon vs. Ohio Dominican
Hendersonville, Tenn.
- 2 p.m. vs. Trevecca Nazarene University
Hendersonville, Tenn.
- 2/19 Noon vs. Kentucky Wesleyan College
Hendersonville, Tenn.

Baseball

- 2/18 1 p.m. vs. Missouri Southern State University
Joplin, Mo.
- 3 p.m. vs. Missouri Southern State University
Joplin, Mo.
- 2/19 1 p.m. vs. Missouri Southern State University
Joplin, Mo.
- 3 p.m. vs. Missouri Southern State University
Joplin, Mo.

OFF CAMPUS HOUSING 2017-2018

CALL FOR THIS WEEK'S SPECIALS!

(660)626-4500

VICKI BENSON
properties

660.665.8100 VickiBenson.net 660.626.4500
Owner/Broker

WWW.TRUMANRENTALS.COM

Providing affordable student housing for more than 30 years

Boardwalk • Waterworks • Park Place
States Avenue • St. James Place • New York Avenue

Four Horizons Realty
703 N. Marion St.
Kirkville, MO 63501
660-665-RENT
www.4horizonsrealty.com