

Senior ‘Dogs wish young pups well

BY STEPHANIE HULETT
Staff Writer

The Truman State University football team ended its season on a four-game winning streak to finish 5-6 overall and 4-3 in the GLVC. It will miss postseason a year after narrowly falling short of the playoffs.

The Bulldogs overcame a 14-0 deficit to come out on top 17-14 Saturday against McKendree University. The ‘Dogs dominated possession time with 43 minutes and 44 seconds to the Bearcats’ 16 minutes and 16 seconds. Truman also ran the ball for 299 yards compared to McKendree’s 99 yards. Truman came close to a school record with 71 rush attempts.

Sophomore running back Jordan Salima set a career high against the Bearcats, with 194 yards on 41 attempts. Salima finished the season with 1,111 rushing yards and became the 20th running back in Bulldog history to rush more than a thousand yards in a season. Redshirt sophomore quarterback Jaden Barr also made record books by setting a single-game record of 81 offensive plays.

The score was 14-7 in the Bearcats favor at halftime, but the Bulldogs came back in the second half with 10 unanswered points. After starting the season 1-6, senior wide receiver Kyle Spratt said coming back to win four games in a row was a product of the team’s persistence.

“We would love to have the first half of the year back, but it was certainly a unique opportunity to be a part of a team that was able to maintain such high levels of collective work-ethic through adversity,” Spratt said.

Spratt said he thinks success is gauged by forward momentum, and that is what the team built with these four wins. As a graduating senior, he said he hopes this continues into the future, so the 2018 Bulldogs will have confidence heading into next season where they will hopefully contend for a GLVC Championship and national championship berth.

Senior defensive back Ben Chaney said the team improved in all three phases of the game — offense, defense and kicking — in the second half of the season, along with their weekly preparation. In the five years he’s been a Bulldog, he can tell the difference between a good practice and a bad one, and the last half of the season he said there were no more bad practices, which led to wins on the field.

Chaney said the grind associated with football season makes it tough for the team to play to potential every week. He said this is especially true when the team is not winning games, yet the team seemed to stay together and improve after each game.

Spratt and Chaney both said as seniors, they hope the young ‘Dogs can step up to fill leadership roles. Chaney said they are losing players on the defensive side of the ball who started for four years.

“There are some young pups on the rise, and my hope is that those younger guys can mature quickly and become great leaders,” Chaney said. “I really hope that they can grasp onto those last four games of this season and carry that on into next year.”

Freshman tight end Jake Ellis said the team is ready to put work in this offseason and this four-game winning streak has built confidence in the team. He said this win against McKendree was big for the seniors because the Bearcats defeated them in the final game last season to force a conference co-championship.

Just like Spratt, Ellis said he hopes this football program can keep building a tight-knit team which competes for conference championships and national playoff appearances. He said this season, the team was consistent even when it was struggling. Even though their overall record did not reflect their hard work, the players showed up every week ready to work hard and play for the seniors leading to the four-game winning streak at the end of the season.

This season, Spratt said the team as a whole was close on and off the field, and the team dedicated its efforts to family, which made the second half success of the season that much sweeter.

Spratt said the players are like brothers in that they are all there for one another and stay resilient through the grind of the season. Chaney said his time as a Bulldog was just like this and he would most definitely do it again if he could.

“In general, being a ‘Dog is an experience I will cherish for the rest of my life,” Chaney said. “I couldn’t be more proud of the guys on this team and their commitment to the other seniors and I. You couldn’t have scripted the end of the season any better. Sports have the ability to bring people together and instill many life lessons like humility, respect and how to handle failure as well as success.”

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- Senior wide receiver Kyle Spratt

Difference of two halves

First 6 games

1-5 record

28.2 points per game allowed

360.2 yards allowed per game

144.3 rushing yards per game

-3:14 total time of possession margin

Last 5 games

4-1 record

17.8 points per game allowed

337 yards allowed per game

213.4 rushing yards per game

+107:37 total time of possession margin

FOOTBALL FINALE | Truman State Bulldogs won their fourth straight game 17-14 to end the season



Photos by Kara Mackenzie/TMN

Above Left: After the Bulldogs fell behind McKendree University by 14 points in the first half, they started to build momentum, with junior running back Malique Robbins returning a kick 50 yards. This led to the Bulldogs narrowing the score 14-7 before halftime.

Above Right: The Bulldogs dominated the Bearcats in time of possession. Truman held the ball for more than 43 minutes and McKendree held the ball for less than 17 minutes. Redshirt sophomore quarterback Jaden Barr led the Bulldog offense in a 15-play, 52-yard drive that ended in a game-tying touchdown pass to freshman tight end Jake Ellis.

Bottom Left: Truman’s running game was three times as productive as McKendree’s. Sophomore running back Jordan Salima had a career-high 195 rushing yards finishing the season as the program’s 20th 1,000-yard rusher.

