TRUMAN FOOTBALL BEGINS SPRING DRILLS

The Truman football team begins spring practice today and will have 29 days to get in 15 practices.

The Bulldogs will don full pads for the first time on Saturday at the 10:45 practice.

On Saturday, April 12, the ‘Dogs will preview next year’s team with their annual spring game. Admission is free to the event at Stokes Stadium.

A complete tentative spring schedule is on the next page.

The Truman football team was one of NCAA Division II’s top offensive threats last season with 419.4 yards a game to rank 20th overall. But the Bulldogs will need to fill the vacancies left by several individuals who were key contributors to the team’s offensive output.

The ‘Dogs got lucky at quarterback last year. After losing the second-most prolific passer in Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association history in 2001, they welcomed Dusty Burk, a transfer from Illinois State, who ended the 2002 season with the second-best campaign in MIAA history with 3,441 total yards.

Now junior Jake Czeschin will take the helm for Truman after studying for the job the last three seasons. As a true freshman in 2000, he was a backup and completed 12 of 29 passes for 152 yards, and had an efficiency rating of 147.03 as a reserve for Burk in 2002. He completed 15-of-19 passes for 154 yards this past season after redshirted behind two seniors in 2001.

Redshirt freshman Grant Norland, and two incoming recruits, Jonathan Duffy and Jimmy DuPage will vie for a backup role. Northern Iowa Transfer, Tyler Shannon will also get a look at QB, but is likely to fill another skill position.

The Bulldogs also need to replace all-America slot receiver Andrew Blakley, who claimed nearly every school career receiving record in ‘02, as well as split end Alfonso Pugh and flanker Geoff Jensen who also rank among Truman’s top 10 receivers all-time.

Redshirt freshman James Perry could get the call at slot, but juniors Mike Pope and Colin Shaw both have game experience that could put them ahead of Perry. In addition, Shannon’s speed and athleticism will garner him a look at slot.

Sophomore James Walton took over late in the year for Pugh who suffered foot problems. Walton’s size and ability are similar to Pugh’s and he showed the potential to be a play-maker in some late-season games in ‘02. Redshirt freshman Richard Mason will also vie for time at slot after showing the coaches his talent on scout teams in 2002.

The job of flanker could go to ‘02’s backup J.D. McCloskey, but look for Shannon to take some reps here as well in the quest for his most effective role on the team. Junior David Winslow will make the move to offense this year after serving as a defensive back the last two years, and will get a look at flanker too.
The running back’s most experienced individual will be Marc Heinecke who has served as both tailback and fullback over the last three seasons. He’s worked hard on his strength, but will be pushed by several freshmen, Brandon Common, A.J. Eads and Jarrard Leverson.

On the offensive line, sophomore Lennie Harrison will take over for first-team all-MIAA center Nick Ruud. Harrison filled in nicely in relief of Ruud last year and impressed the coaches in non-game situations. Juniors Eric Stewart, at left tackle, Greg Klipsch, at left guard and Craig Knoth, at right guard, all return.

Junior Rusty Wood looks to fill the only vacancy on the line at right tackle.

Aside from the loss of all-conference D-tackle Nick Weite, everyone returns to the defensive line, including a wealth of talented freshman. Senior Dan Bredenkoetter and juniors Ted Guisinger and Beau Nelson head up the defensive trenches, while juniors Sean Morris and Nick West will also vie for significant playing time.

The inside linebackers are slated to be junior Mike Mowen and senior Tameem Yehyawi, but watch for transfer Derek Hobbs in the mix along with several others.

Derek Kent is the top returner among the outside linebackers. He has finished among the team’s top two tackle-leaders since his freshman season and looks to finish his career in 2003 with his third-straight all-MIAA honors.

The other outside spot seems to be held by junior Ben Wilson who has shown steady improvement and came on strong last year to earn his first all-league recognition in 2002.

The Truman cornerbacks are slated to be senior Sean Lowery and sophomore Jayson Douglas. Lowery has been a part-time starter for two seasons, while Douglas had a break-out season as a true freshman on special teams last year, not the least of which was a game in which he returned two kickoffs for touchdowns.

Sophomore Marcus Yokley and redshirt freshman and scout team player of the year Larry Gigilio will challenge for the role of safety. Yokley became a starter as a true freshman last year and did well in his first collegiate season.

All-MIAA kicker/punter Austin Lepper will be replaced by junior Mark Kamphoefner. Kamphoefner also worked out among the linebackers while serving as backup to Lepper, but will focus his attention solely on kicking duties this year.