The Pine Needle
April 14, 2011

State of UNCP athletics strong

By Nick Phillips
Sports Editor

Behind every great team is a leader, and behind every great leader there is a general.

From his office inside the English E. Jones Center, UNCP Director of Athletics Dan Kenney has been at the helm of the Braves’ 16 sports since 1998, including overseeing the additions of three sports to the program.

Program Stats
With the spring sports schedule wrapping up, 2010-2011 has been a great year for UNCP on the courts and fields, with 12 of the 16 teams having .500 records or better, as of April 12.

Seven different teams received regional rankings during the season, with the Braves wrestling team finishing its season ranked fifth in the country at the National Championships in early March.

Men’s basketball head coach Ben Miller led the Braves to their first-ever appearance in the Big Dance the same weekend Weakley and Williams competed on the national stage.

Miller and the basketball Braves’ NCAA appearance came on the heels of their first ever Peach Belt Conference Championship game, winning three tournament games en route to the final.

The Lady Braves soccer team competed in the NCAA tournament for the second time in the past three seasons, advancing to the second round before exiting as they played into mid-November.

The final national championship appearance came the first weekend in December when sophomore Pardon Ndhlovu represented the men’s cross country team in the NCAA’s biggest race for the second consecutive year.

Another objective category for Kenney is the Peach Belt Conference’s Commissioner’s Cup, which measures overall athletic excellence within the league.

UNCP has never finished higher than 10th overall, while this season the Braves sit tied for fourth after the fall and winter seasons.

“I’ve always said head coaches make the difference,” Kenney said about UNCP’s positive athletic results.

In the classroom
The statistics that Kenney may be most proud of may not be tabulated in games or practices.

“We have seven teams out of 16 in the athletic department that their average GPA is a 3.0,” he said.

Kenney credits the coaches for each creating an academic culture that lays out what is acceptable and what’s not acceptable while placing emphasis on attending class and getting their education.

Internal motivation
“The success of each program is attributed to what the head coach is doing,” Kenney continued about the coaches.

The coaches feed off each other, Kenney said, and as one coach tastes success, others push that much harder to follow suit.

“They are a competitive lot. If they see someone like Ben (Miller) go to the NCAA’s, they are saying ‘hey, that’s something I want to do too,’” Kenney described.

State of UNCP athletics strong continued on page 6B