Head coach Pete Shinnick offered a very simple description for the upcoming 2011 season for his UNCP football team. “It’s huge,” Shinnick said.

Using the word huge to describe the Braves’ 2011 campaign seems like a fitting word. But don’t think that expectations inside the program have lightened up. “Anytime you lose the numbers we lost, it’s a challenge,” Shinnick said. “It’s a huge test for our program and our players to see where we are. We don’t want to get that one good season every eight years. That’s not what we are trying to get accomplished here. We want to continually be one of the best teams in the region, and with the schedule we’re playing we are going to find out if we are,” he added.

Coming off a season in which they lost 22 seniors and struggled to the finish line, losing their final three games for a 5-5 record, the 15 spring practices allotted by the NCAA were more valuable and served a bigger purpose than they have been in years past. “From day one to day 15, we got better,” Shinnick said.

With the losses of so many seniors, players who were sitting on the depth chart as second or third teamers will now find themselves as first and second team players seeing a lot more action. Shinnick said he was pleased with the team’s effort and attitude over the month of practices, adding that it was “extremely valuable to see what the future of our team looks like.”

“I feel like (this spring) was a great experience, a great opportunity for those guys, and at the same time we got done what we needed to offensively and defensively,” Shinnick said of spring practices.

Spring game The culmination of the spring workouts was the annual Black and Gold Spring Game on April 12 as part of Installation Week for Chancellor Kyle R. Carter.

An unconventional scoring system, which awarded points based off a variety of different types of plays, allowed the defense a chance to “score,” holding a late lead before losing 42-33 to the offense.

In the game, redshirt sophomore quarterback Luke Charles played like he wanted to earn the starting quarterback job, left vacated by the graduating Cory Smith. Charles tallied a 14-for-20 passing night while throwing for 151 yards and a 40-yard touchdown to junior Donald Britt.

Among the other signal callers involved in the QB competition, junior Jonathan Efird, a transfer from Western Carolina, completed 7-of-14 passes for 41 yards while tossing an interception. Redshirt sophomore Teland Todd was 5-of-9 passing for 41 yards, and he also picked up 52 yards on four runs.

Sophomore Ben Decelle led all receivers with six catches for 67 yards, but the Braves saw three other players catch three or more passes as well, including sophomore Michael Verry’s four catch, 39-yard performance.

UNC football highlights offseason practice

By Nick Phillips

Head coach Pete Shinnick offered a very simple description for the upcoming 2011 season for his UNCP football team. “It’s huge,” Shinnick said. Using the word huge to describe the Braves’ 2011 campaign seems like a fitting word. But don’t think that expectations inside the program have lightened up. “Anytime you lose the numbers we lost, it’s a challenge,” Shinnick said. “It’s a huge test for our program and our players to see where we are. We don’t want to get that one good season every eight years. That’s not what we are trying to get accomplished here. We want to continually be one of the best teams in the region, and with the schedule we’re playing we are going to find out if we are,” he added.

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Senior Travis Daniels totaled 65 yards on the night, including a touchdown early in the game. In that early touchdown drive, Daniels had three carries for 39 yards before finishing off the drive when he scored from one yard out. Todd led the offense to its late score, moving the troops 70 yards downfield for the final score of the night.

On the defensive side of the ball, redshirt freshmen Cadet Darren Mason and Josh Barbour led UNCP.

Mason finished the night with a game-high seven tackles, five of which were solo tackles, while Barbour finished with five solo tackles, two sacks and forced two fumbles.

Spring notes Daniels’ 65 yards in the Spring Game were a big step for a player who stayed injured in 2010 and never fully gained the momentum that helped him shine in 2009.

Shinnick said that it will be “crucial” for Daniels to get off to a good start in 2011, adding that he liked what he saw over the spring. “He was what I hoped for this spring, and I think he can be better than he’s ever been this fall,” Shinnick said of Daniels.

Shinnick and the Braves hope Daniels.

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