By Nick Phillips

A 41-38, double overtime thriller made it a rivalry.

A 39-0 thumping gave the Braves control of the series.

A third-straight win in the third installment of the Two Rivers Classic would give the UNCP football team firm control over regional bragging rights over Fayetteville State.

Especially since two of the three wins will have come on the road at Fayetteville State.

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“A lot of them were in high school or standing on the sidelines, so I don’t think it carries any extra weight,” he added.

Despite the loss of 22 seniors that played huge roles in both wins in the Fayetteville State series, as well as building the Braves program overall, with the results of the two Classic contests, it’s easy to get carried away.

“A rivalry is when you have two teams that for some reason just hate each other,” said former UNCP quarterback Cory Smith back before the first game of the series in 2009.

Smith was one of the Braves 22 seniors that graduated last season.

The gritty, double-overtime win inside Luther “Nick” Jeralds Stadium in 2009 that saw the Braves prevail left Fayetteville State with a sour taste in their mouth.

The Braves 39-point offensive explosion, coupled with the UNCP defense holding the Broncos to under 100 yards of total offense, punched Fayetteville State square in the mouth.

However, Shin Nick was once again quick to point out that it’s a new crop of Braves that will be on the field this time around.

“Obviously they are our first game,” ShinNick said.

“The opening game is always anxious and has questions. How’s the team going to play? How are they going to respond? There are no guarantees year to year,” he added.

The two games in the series have drawn almost 15,000 fans combined, and another big crowd is expected Sept. 3 in the third installment of the Two Rivers Classic.

The crowds can be attributed to the mere 47 miles that separate the two schools.

“It’s a great situation for both teams,” Shin Nick said.

“There will be great crowds and there’s not a lot of travel involved. Fans on both sides will come support their team,” he added.

Can the new-generation of Braves put their stamp on the Two Rivers Classic and give UNCP a chokehold on the rivalry? Or will the third time be the charm for Fayetteville State?

Regardless if the game is a nail biter or a blowout, one way or another, it will be memorable.