Later in 1999, the University’s Board of Trustees appointed an ad hoc committee to conduct a study about the possibility of adding football as a collegiate sport.

The University, and Director of Athletics Dan Kenney, looked at schools of similar size to UNCP as well as sought the advice of Buddy Saxer, who at the time was the Commissioner of the Big South Conference and was at Coastal Carolina University when they brought football to their campus.

The committee reported back to the Board of Trustees that until enrollment at UNCP grew, the idea of adding football was remote. The idea was abandoned.

For the moment.

Fast forward five years, to spring 2004.

“It’s the Friday before graduation. I remember this day like it was yesterday,” Kenney recalls.

“Let’s do it.”

Kenney’s phone rang and Chancellor Meadors was on the other end of the call. The message was clear – enrollment was up to 4,000 students. It was time to study adding football again.

By the end of the summer, the UNCP Board of Trustees requested another study be undertaken.

At their December 2004 meeting, the Board of Trustees received the Football Feasibility Study, a 28-page document that covered a wide range of topics from the history of football at UNCP, to start-up costs associated with beginning a program in the annual costs of a football program. Also included was a timetable for starting the program on campus.

“After that meeting, they voted to go ahead and add football as a varsity sport effective fall of 2007,” Kenney said.

Although the go ahead was given to begin starting the football program at UNCP, there were many questions still to be answered.

“There were a lot of things we had to overcome. Sometimes we had things come up,” Kenney was quick to add.

Facilities

Although taken for granted now, back in 2004, nearly all of what sits just west of campus across the university Drive was not yet built.

“In September of ’05, we are having this kickoff for football, and we are standing over at the Belk Complex. There was nothing there. There was a track there, that’s where the soccer team played. There was a scoreboard, a track and there was nothing else over there. I was scared that day,” Kenney said of the site that now houses the football program’s facility on campus.

Although the final choice, the Belk Complex was not the only option for where the football team might play.

Ideas to play at either Pamiah Scott High School or Lumberton High School were pushed.

“Early on, one of the things we were looking at was if it was going to be better for us to play at the old Pembroke High School and refurbish their stadium,” Kenney said.

But Kenney couldn’t let the idea of playing at an on-campus site go.

“I really didn’t like the idea of playing off-campus. I thought that would not be in the University’s best interest. I thought having a facility on campus would be the way to go,” Kenney added.

Kenney’s wish came true.

In September 2006, ground was broken on what would become the Bob McIntyre Fieldhouse, which was completed and turned over to the University in spring 2007. Kenney marks the completion of the fieldhouse as one of the many milestones in building the football program.

“When the coaches were first hired, they were in this building,” Kenney said, referring to the English E. Jones Center.

“That was a big moment,” Kenney added.

A leader for the job

Although the official search for a head coach did not begin until fall 2005, inquiries had been coming in to Kenney and UNCP more than a year before.

Kenney points to numerous contacts from interested coaches in the spring of 2004, months after the UNCP Board of Trustees gave the go ahead to begin the football program.

In spring 2005, Kenney first heard about a guy in California who could be a great coach.

“As fate would have it, same summer, Coach Shinnick, on his own, called me up,” Kenney added.

“Kenney couldn’t let the idea of playing at an on-campus site go.”

Kenney was trying to be fair to everyone involved but he hadn’t started the official search yet. He said he was coming to campus, and I said if we ran into each other, great, but I wasn’t making any appointments because everyone was asking.”

Kenney said, describing his phone conversation with Shinnick.

Kenney and Shinnick ran into each other at Shinick’s new job.

“Shinnick was walking through the Jones Center.”

“We met and talked for about 30 minutes. I was very impressed by him,” Kenney said of the first meeting. Shinick continued on 11B...