Volleyball back on track

By Nick Phillips

Editor

After several sub-par seasons, the UNCP volleyball team is again heading in the right direction, after their 2011 campaign ended with a 16-16 record and a trip to the Peach Belt Conference Tournament's semi-final round. The Lady Braves just missed out on an invitation to the NCAA Tournament, finishing ninth in the final NCAA Division II Southeast Regional standings. The top eight teams in each region make up the 64-team postseason tournament. UNCP finished the regular season in third in the PBC, their highest regular season finish in 16 seasons. This season's 500 record comes after UNCP finished 19-14 overall in 2010. Last season, the Lady Braves tallied only a 5-9 clip in PBC play, but this fall they finished league play at 7-7 overall.

Five seniors graced the roster for the Lady Braves in 2011, but the program doesn't look to lose much productivity for 2012, with three freshmen, three sophomores and three juniors all remaining from this season's team that saw production come from seemingly every player. Senior Rebecca Morgan, named second-team all-conference for her efforts, finished her final season in the Black and Gold with a team-leading 387 kills. But what might be the most telling sign that the Lady Braves are in a good situation is that the players with the second and third-most kills in 2011 were a pair of freshmen, in Chelsea Phillips and Hannah Hill, respectively.

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The Braves were able to get back to being able to run the ball well and pass the ball effectively, something that was lacking in 2010 due to injuries. The first name to come to mind when discussing the offense is senior Travis Daniels, who racked up 1631 rushing yards and 13 touchdowns in his final campaign, setting seemingly every record along the way.

Another name is quarterback Luke Charles, as the redshirt-sophomore set the record for most passing yards in a season when he compiled 2978 total yards through the air over the 11 game season. Charles had 25 touch-down passes, averaging 270 passing yards per game and connecting on 60 percent of his passes attempts, a stat he and the Braves hope will stay the same, if not get better, in 2012. The Braves will lose seniors on the offensive line, but will retain much of the remainder of the offense, with a bevy of backs ready for the opportunity to take more snaps next season with Daniels' departure. Defense was an area of concern for UNCP at the beginning of the season, but the young group grew before our eyes and got better every week. Much of their core will remain intact for 2012 as well, including redshirt-junior Fred Williams, who set a new single-season record with 113 tackles this season.

The Braves averaged 480 total yards offensively in 2011, while the UNCP defense held opponents to 480 total yards offensively in 2011, while the UNCP defense held opponents to an average of 411 total yards a game.

Charles is a finalist for the Power ratedSports.com All-Big NCAA Division II Quarterback of the Year award, an award given yearly to the signal caller that has the highest average score over eight considered statistical areas. Daniels is one of 22 candidates for the 2011 Harlon Hill Trophy, the award given to the NCAA Division II College Football Player of the Year.

While they get the national attention, they are the first to give the credit back to their teammates. And that is what helps the Braves be good year after year.

Football stuck in middle

By Nick Phillips

Editor

The UNCP football team rebounded from a 500 record season ago with an 8-3 record in 2011. But for a program that has already experienced two nine-win seasons and an NCAA playoff berth, that record isn't good enough. Last season, the program didn't look to lose much productivity for 2012, with three freshmen, three sophomores and three juniors all returning from this season's team that saw production come from seemingly every player.

Senior Travis Varne (146 kills) and Heath Bolwer (117 kills) rounded out the top-five in kills for UNCP in 2011. Sophomore Marissa Baker and junior Ashlyn Rebok both played 110 of 113 total sets for the UNCP backcourt, both will return as part of the Lady Braves' core.

Baker, named to the PBC all-tournament team, led the Black and Gold with 618 digs defensively from her libero position, while Rebok dished out 971 assists as UNCP setter and "quarterback" of the Lady Braves' offense in her first season in Pembroke.

Overall, the Lady Braves have the talent to be just as good, if not better, than their 2011 showing. They have shown considerable improvement over the last several seasons and have the pieces in place for a run in 2012.

Final Record: 16-16

Football

Final Record: 8-3

Volleyball

Final Record: 16-16

Football

Final Record: 8-3