By Matt Smith
Sports Editor

Demarcus Lyday’s team high 15 point contribution wasn’t enough for the Black and Gold men’s basketball team as the Braves fell 81-67 to the North Georgia Saints on Jan. 10 at the English E. Jones Center.

Lyday scored 15 points on 6-11 shooting while dishing out two assists, but the North Georgia bench dropped 35 points of their own to lead the Saints past the scrappy Braves.

“We dug ourselves early holes in the first and second halves and had to exert a lot of energy to dig ourselves out,” said UNCP head coach Ben Miller. “We’ve got to give a lot of credit to the Saints for their athleticism, and making big plays in situations where we couldn’t.”

The Braves’ offense produced three point deduction in the first half, burying the Braves early and after a slow start, the Black and Gold went into the half tied with Saints at 34.

The North Georgia offense would regroup in the second period, starting the half much like it opened the game.

The Saints spurted out 12 points over the first six minutes of the half, burying the Braves into a hole they couldn’t climb out of. The Braves would battle back multiple times to get within seven of the Saints, but North Georgia connected on 12-14 free throws down the stretch to seal the win.

UNCP shot a solid 42 percent from the field and won the turnover battle 18-14.

Unfortunately, the Saints’ bench proved to be the game’s deciding factor as the Braves’ reserves could only muster up 10 points as compared to the Saints 35.

Thomas led the Black and Gold with 10 rebounds and senior guard Cortez Brown dished out three assists to lead the Braves.

While the team played well as a whole, the Saints’ firepower overpowered the Braves.

The Saints shot 46 percent for the game, including 54 percent from the 3-point line for the night.

Defensively, the Braves had four blocks on the night.

The loss was the Braves’ third consecutive defeat, keeping the team winless in the conference.

The Braves’ final place winner was fifth-seeded Erik Stancil who finished in sixth place in the 285-pound heavyweight class. Stancil earned a 7-1 victory over eight-seeded Chuck Robinson of Carson-Newman in the consolation-tournament’s quarterfinal before falling in his next two rounds against his competition.

Overall, the Braves’ 11th place finish was a seven spot improvement from the 2006-2007 season. The team is steadily improving as compared to last year.

The Braves tallied 46-1/2 points, and the four place winners gave the Braves 23 top-6 finishers on the season in just four tournaments.