By Stephanie French
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UNCP’s baseball team has not fully secured it, but they can look forward to the post season in May, due to strong ambitions of players and coaches to improve a slacking Peach Belt Conference record midway through the season.

Head coach Paul O’Neil can be proud of his baseball team for what they have accomplished. April 18 marked a school record setting day for the most single season victories. The team has also moved from last place in the conference to competing for a ticket into the conference tournament.

The season started off at home against nearby rival St. Andrews and the non-conference wins just added up. Peach Belt teams continued to take down the Braves as the season progressed, but at the start of April, UNCP started playing as a whole team to improve to where they are today.

Keys to success
Non-conference games seemed to be the stronghold for UNCP early on in the season. Going into a key match-up with Lenoir Rhyne, ranked 21 at the time, the out of conference record was at 18-3.

For the same span, the Braves posted a 4-11 record in Peach Belt duels. “We had many close games early in our season that set us back in the conference standings, but now we are starting to get some close games to turn in our favor, and we have moved up tremendously in the conference standing because of it,” Dean said.

An 11-7 victory over the ranked Lenoir Rhyne seemed to set the team’s confidence very high. The win was the first of a 12-game winning streak.

Coach O’Neil even commented on how the team had a higher confidence that helped them play more consistently and allowed them to perform at the highest level possible. Even the players have seen a boost in their self-esteem.

“Winning 12 straight is a hard task to complete. It feels great to do it, though, and it is coming at a wonderful time in our season. It will give us some momentum going into the conference tournament,” Dean said.

Key wins against highly ranked teams have been a large factor for the Braves as well. The March 21 and 22 series against conference rival North Georgia started a trend in play. UNCP brought home the opening game of the series but dropped the back two. At the time, North Georgia was ranked at No. 26 in the region.

Less than 10 days later, the team defeated Lenoir Rhyne. The most recent victories over ranked teams are the April 18 and 19 weekend series against Georgia College during a six-game homestand for the Braves. Black and Gold stole the series opener right out from the Indians’ belts, dropped the second of the April 17 doubleheader, then went on to blow the Indians right out of the ballpark in a 16-4 uprooting.

The lack of injuries has also played a role in where the Braves stand today. No player was injured during the season. The only loss the team has suffered was junior left-handed pitcher Justin Yow, who underwent labrum surgery to repair a shoulder injury early in the fall semester.

“We have had our bumps and bruises, but we have not had a major injury during the season. Keeping everyone, especially the core group, healthy is always important to your success,” O’Neil said.

Final farewell
At the conclusion to this season, the Diamond Braves will be graduating four players from the team. All four of them have had a key impact for the team.

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