A season full of ups and downs for the UNCP softball team in 2009 is drawing to a close. In head coach Lacinda Melanson’s first season at the University, the team finished 18-28 overall, with a 7-11 record in Peach Belt Conference play.

“I’ve enjoyed my first year,” said Melanson on her first year and adjusting to the environment here at UNCP.

Although it is easy for a new coach to come in and push their ideas onto the team, Melanson did not try and change the techniques of her team. She said that she can see improvement in the conditioning of the players, something she tried to implement during both the fall and spring. More than working on changing a player’s technique, something that can be automatic after years of repeatedly practicing it countless numbers of times, Melanson focused more on the mental aspect of her team.

“Physically, this team has all the tools to be a highly competitive team. It’s just getting us mental-ly where we need to be,” Melanson added.

Shaw tops Braves
Junior third baseman Jelena Shaw was at or near the top of several statistical categories this season. The soon-to-be senior batted .252 and had a team high .381 batting average this season. She also has a leadoff spot in 38 games, and has all the tools to be a [570x719]coach…and I believe the team as a whole adapted quickly,” Shaw said.

Melanson pushed her team not only on the field, but in the classroom and study hall sessions as well. Sophomore Lynn Grantham has noticed “improvements in our grades as well as our play on the field” when it comes to the differences she has seen this season.

Shaw added that this season included “strict study hall policy and grade checks and more discipline overall.”

In a season that had many games delayed or postponed due to a rainy spring, coupled with a travel-heavy schedule and the loss of several players a variety of reasons, Melanson thinks that the team’s final record will not accurately show the hard work of the players this season.

“I do wish we’d have had a better win-loss record...as I’ve told the girls, if we can learn from those lessons, then we will have the capability of reaching our goals.”

“Then those losses truly become successes in the end because we learn from our games,” Melanson said.

The Lady Braves will have a great opportunity to learn from this season, as a full roster will return, minus graduating senior Candace Evans.

Evans leads pitchers
Evans made nine starts this season as a pitcher, compiling a 4.5-1 record going into conference tournament action.

She also had 28 starts as a designated hitter, finishing with four multi-hit games and four multi-RBI games this season. As a pitcher, Evans had to go through four different pitching coaches in the fall and spring, coupled with a new coach to come in as a [720x220]age old saying “winning isn’t every-thing” is often challenged. The Lady Braves look to create their own answer to the quote – as a season full of bumps and bruises and a lot of rain and asphalt, are positive in the long run for a team that has learned valuable lessons that go beyond the game of softball.

Young squad returns
With a relatively young squad returning, the team will look to ris- ing seniors Randi Pruitt, Kelly Niccum, and Shaw, as well as rising juniors Lynn Grantham and Courtney Hill for leader- ship next season.

When asked about her approaching senior cam- paign, Shaw said that she was “looking forward to the experience” as the team and Melanson will have had a year together and will “know how to respond to one another and work together.”

Pruitt started 45 games this season, with 43 of those behind the plate.

She batted 252 and will be looking to com-bine to continue to create a strong battery with ris- ing junior pitcher Whitney Landwermeyer.

Landwermeyer started a team high 20 games as a pitcher this season, compiling a 9-11 record. Morgan Patrick, who led the team with 10 multi-RBI games this sea- son, as well as Grantham and Hill, all will be jun- iors as this young team continues to grow older and wiser.

Hill has 26 RBIs on the season, trailing only Patrick’s 34 runs driven in.

“I think next year will be a good year for us. We owe a lot of teams pay- back. When next season rolls around, I think we will come out of the gate running, ready to roll over some teams and show them what we are made of,” said Grantham on the upcoming season.

Shaw added, “I believe that this season was a stepping stone for the upcoming season. Also, outside of softball, coach Melanson is quite the disciplinarian, so I believe she will continue to help us grow as individ- uals.”

Growing as individu- als, players and as a team are common themes among both players and coach Melanson as the UNCP softball team takes lessons they have learned this season and turn them into productive games and positive outcomes next season.

The age old saying “winning isn’t every-thing” is often challenged. The Lady Braves look to create their own answer to the quote – as a season full of bumps and bruises and a lot of rain and asphalt, are positive in the long run for a team that has learned valuable lessons that go beyond the game of softball.