By Nick Phillips
Sports Editor

With UNCP hosting the second installment of the Two Rivers Classic against Fayetteville State, many fans were expecting another close contest similar to last season’s 41-34 double overtime Braves win.

What the 6,429 fans saw inside Grace P. Johnson Stadium was a 39-0 win from UNCP that left no doubt who is the best team in the area.

The Braves held only a slim, one touchdown lead over the Broncos at halftime, but poured on five touchdowns and a safety in the second half as they walked away with a commanding win while retaining the Two Rivers Cup.

Senior Rashon Kennedy had two rushing touchdowns on the night to lead the rushing attack, while quarterback Corey Smith connected for a 13-yard touchdown pass to Cody Harrington at the end of the first quarter to open up the scoring. “These guys have worked hard. Our theme for this week was ‘60 minutes,’ we wanted to play a full 60 minutes, and our guys did. We came into the season saying we want to leave no doubt about where our program wants to go,” UNCP head coach Pete Shinnick said following the game. “I love watching these guys practice, I love being around them and I love to watch them play,” Shinnick added.

Defensive prowess
The Braves defense was stifling from start to finish, as they held Fayetteville State to under 100 yards of total offense for the game while completely shutting down the Broncos running game. Fayetteville State finished the contest with 22 rushing attempts totaling 22 yards.

UNCP put pressure on Fayetteville State quarter- back Andreas Hudson all night, as they finished with seven team sacks. Braves redshirt freshman Devon Bush registered three sacks of his own in the route. Owen Thomas’ sack in the end zone led to a Fayetteville State safety as the defense was swarming and putting constant pressure on Hudson as he was forced to attempt more passes with the Broncos behind on the scoreboard.

The Braves held Fayetteville State to only six total first downs for the game, as they allowed the Broncos to complete just three of their 13 third down attempts, while also not allowing Fayetteville State inside the 20 yard line all night.

One stat that the Broncos hurt themselves with was in the penalty yardage, as Fayetteville State finished with nearly 100 yards less this season, finishing the game with 254 total team rushing yards on 38 carries. The difference came in the passing game.

In last season’s game, the Braves threw for only 184 yards in the air. Smith and the Braves only threw for 12 more yards than last season, finishing with 196 yards, but were able to exploit the Broncos secondary for multiple big plays.

“They were coming out with nine people in the box, and that’s what we thought we were going to get against them because we ran the ball for over 300 yards against them a year ago,” Smith said.

Redshirt junior Josh Throckmorton moved outside to the wide receiver position at the start of the season after previously playing tight end, and finished with three catches for 33 yards. Sophomore Donald Britt pulled down four catches of his own for 31 yards, while Harrington had 40 yards receiving, including the opening touchdown, as Smith spread the ball around the field to seven different receivers.

Running downhill
The Braves running backs averaged 6.7 yards per carry, and for a team that uses its running game as much as UNCP, that is a big statistic.

UNCP tight end Cody Harrington hauls in a touchdown pass from quarterback Corey Smith to open the scoring in the Two Rivers Classic against Fayetteville State. 

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