

Braves drop two of three in road series

By Nick Phillips
Sports Editor

The seventh-ranked UNCP baseball team hit a PBC roadblock on the road March 26 and 27, dropping the first two games of their three game set with No. 22 Columbus State before recovering to win the finale.

In the opener, the Braves found themselves on the wrong side of a two-hit shutout by Columbus State's Thomas Campbell, while the hosts got two home runs offensively.

UNCP juniors Aaron Parnell and Brad Bridgeman tallied the only two hits for the Braves in the game.

Braves senior Josh Bagley was saddled with his first loss of the season after giving up seven hits, three walks and four runs over 6 1/3 innings of work. Bagley also struck out seven Columbus State batters.

Columbus State got on the board in the second inning thanks to a Ryan Lewis two-run homer, and the score would remain there until Logan Dollar, leading

off the bottom of the sixth, moved the lead to 3-0.

Columbus State added their final run on a RBI single in the seventh inning.

Game two

In the second game, Columbus State came back from an early UNCP lead to win 4-2 in a game that began on March 26 before being interrupted by lighting and resumed on March 27.

Braves senior Keith Whitman belted his fourth home run of the year, while Bridgeman and senior Jason Coker added two hits in the loss.

Senior pitcher Brad Isom fell to 5-2 on the year after giving up four runs and nine hits while striking out four Columbus State batters.

UNCP got on the board first in the fourth inning, with junior Eitan Maoz reaching base on a two-out bunt single before Whitman's blast.

Columbus State would take the game from there, however, scoring two runs

in the bottom of the fourth to tie the game before a home run in the fifth inning and a RBI single in the sixth to move it to the final, 4-2 score.

Salvage win

The Braves' bats finally came alive in the final game of the series, knocking 14 hits around the field en route to a 9-1 win.

Parnell had two RBI doubles and scored twice in a 3-for-4 performance, while Maoz also had a three-hit game while turning in three RBIs.

Senior Joe Mangum had two RBIs to go with two hits, while senior Kenny Mickens also tallied two hits.

Senior Brian Willis struck out two batters and allowed only four hits over six innings for his third-straight win since being moved to the starting rotation.

Junior Braxton Lewis gave up only one hit in the final three innings for the save.

UNCP jumped on the



Photo by Nick Faulkner
Braves junior Brad Bridgeman connects with a pitch against USC Aiken earlier this season. In the series against Columbus State, Bridgeman knocked four hits over the three games.

board in the first inning with Maoz's RBI single before Columbus State tallied their only run of the day in the bottom of the frame.

The Braves scored three runs in the second inning with two outs to jump ahead

for good before adding a run in the seventh and eighth innings.

The visitors capped the win with a three-run ninth inning that saw eight hitters go to the plate.

Braves rout Barton 22-5

By Curtis Brooks
Sports Writer

The seventh-ranked UNCP baseball team obliterated nonconference foe Barton 22-5 on the road March 22.

Led by a whole slew of Braves' hitters, UNCP ran off 16 consecutive runs at one point.

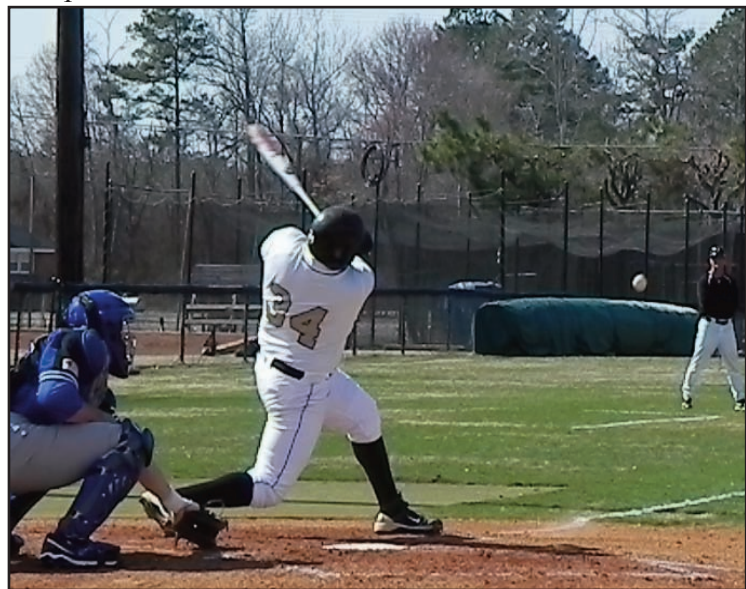


Photo by Mindy Hubbard
UNCP's Keith Whitman hits a pitch down the third base line earlier this season against North Georgia. Whitman finished with two home runs and four RBIs against Barton on March 22.

The Braves hitting overwhelmed host Barton's pitching staff, connecting for 17 total hits.

UNCP senior Keith Whitman led the Braves' slugfest with a two home run performance for the eighth time in his career, while also driving in four RBIs on a 3-for-4 performance at the plate.

Senior Kenny Mickens and sophomore Chase Grissom contributed to the Braves' offensive outburst by knocking a home run apiece for the Braves.

Grissom's three-run homer in the eighth inning was the first of his collegiate career.

Whitman and fellow senior Joe Mangum each registered three hits for the Braves, while juniors Josh Haley and Brad Bridgeman and senior Jason Coker each racked up two hits for visiting UNCP.

An 11-run fifth inning, a five-run inning in the eighth, and a three-run third inning produced the bulk of the UNCP offensive attack.

Bulldogs only mustered up five runs and nine hits in the contest.

Freshman relief pitcher Brandon Huffman received the decision for the Braves, finishing with three strikeouts, while also retiring all 10 batters that he faced.

Diamond Braves stomp Mars Hill

By Jared Leblanc
Sports Writer

The UNCP baseball team scored early and often in their 11-2 routing of the Lions of Mars Hill March 16, at Sammy Cox Field in Pembroke, scoring four first-inning runs.

The Black and Gold were led by junior Josh Hayley and senior Keith Whitman, who each had three hits in the game and registered two and three runs respectively.

Freshman Brandon Huffman and senior Joe Mangum also swung hot bats, knocking in two RBIs a piece.

Senior Brian Willis was credited with the win on the hill after starting in his first game in nearly two years.

Willis fanned five Mars Hill batters and allowed

only four hits in his three innings of work, as UNCP also had five other pitchers throw in the game.

UNCP looked dominant from the get go, batting through the line-up in the first inning as they plated the four runs.

The Braves continued to steam roll the Lions from there, picking up two more runs in the third and two more in the fifth off Mangum's bases-clearing double.

The Black and Gold's hopes of a shutout were dashed in the top of the sixth inning when the Lions' Dalton Hardee hit a bases clearing single to score the two lone runs for Mars Hill.

The Braves answered back, scoring a run in each of the next three innings to finish the scoring.

Braves take two wins from visiting USC Aiken

By Curtis Brooks
Sports Writer

With the Peach Belt Conference season in full swing, the UNCP baseball team continued its dominant play, taking two out of three games against PBC foe USC Aiken in the series on March 19 and 20 at home.

Opening victory

In the first game of a double header against USC Aiken, the seventh-ranked Braves defeated the Pacers 6-4, due to great team hitting.

The win stretched the UNCP winning streak to seven games, while also giving the Braves their best 25 game start in school history.

The UNCP offensive attack was led by Josh Haley's hitting, one of seven different Braves to grab a hit in the contest.

Haley finished the game with two hits, a single and a game deciding two-run homer in the eighth inning, while also contributing to the Braves' effort with a stolen base and scoring two runs.

Braves' starter Josh Bagley received a no decision after allowing the Pacers to take a 4-3 lead in the fifth inning, after he gave up only three hits but four runs and five walks.

Reliever Brantley Hat-trich picked up win number three on the year for the Braves after striking out two USC Aiken batters in three hitless innings of work.

UNCP reliever Braxton Lewis recorded his second save of the season, after strong pitching in the ninth and final inning.

With USC Aiken still holding a 4-3 lead in the seventh inning, Jason Coker knocked a two-out, RBI single to tie the game to help set up Haley's homer in the eighth inning.

Blown second game

In the second game of the series, the Braves lost to the Pacers by a score of 5-1, behind a complete game by Pacer starter Thomas McLeod. The loss broke UNCP's seven-game winning streak, while also snapping USC Aiken's five-game conference losing

streak.

McLeod overwhelmed the Braves with great pitching, as the Pacer starter threw 138 pitches over nine innings while also striking out nine UNCP batters.

UNCP starter Brad Isom received his first loss of the season after surrendering eight hits and four runs in six innings of work.

Isom did strike out two Pacer batters in a losing effort.

To add on to the Braves' pitching woes, UNCP also committed three crucial errors.

In a losing effort, Kenny Mickens went 3-3 from the plate with three singles. Haley also collected his second home run of the series, finishing the game 2-for-5 from the plate.

Final triumph

The Braves held off a late game rally at the end of the final game of the three game series with USC Aiken to give UNCP a 5-4 win over the Pacers.

Great Braves hitting was the story of this game, with three Braves getting two hits apiece.



Photo by Nick Faulkner
Braves junior Josh Haley bunts a ball against USC Aiken on March 19. Haley totaled four hits and scored four times while picking up three RBIs in the weekend series.

UNCP's Jason Coker turned in a 2-for-3 batting performance with a home run and a double.

Brad Bridgeman also had a 2-for-3 day at the plate, with a pair of singles, as he scored two runs. Eitan Maoz had 2-for-4 outing, with two singles and a crucial RBI in the fifth inning.

Braves starter Brian Willis received his second start in five days, and registered the win after a four-strikeout performance in five innings of work.

Tied at 3-3 after three innings, Maoz delivered an RBI single in the fifth inning to give UNCP the lead before Keith Whitman drew a bases-loaded walk in the bottom of the seventh inning in what proved to be the winning run.

USC Aiken cut into the lead with a run in the top of the eighth but was stopped there by UNCP's Lewis, who struck out two of the five final batters of the game.