

Braves open season against West Virginia

By Nick Phillips
Sports Editor

Prior to the season, UNCP men's head basketball coach Ben Miller said that to understand his team's play, the Braves must face high level competition.

The Braves did just that on Nov. 5, traveling to Morgantown, W. Va., to play against NCAA Division I talent West Virginia. The Mountaineers, a Final Four team a year ago, toppled UNCP 87-53, but the Braves came away from the game with several bright spots from the box score.

Reigning Peach Belt Conference Freshman of the Year Shahmel Brackett led the Braves offensively with 10 points while shooting 50 percent from the floor in 27 minutes of action.

A trio of juniors followed Brackett on the stat sheet, with Marcus Heath putting in nine points with three rebounds and three as-



UNCP sophomore George Blakeney and West Virginia's John Flowers both look up after a whistle as both players battled for a loose ball in the Nov. 5 game.

sists while also playing 27 minutes.

Forwards Nate Priest and Cody Hughes followed for UNCP, with Priest adding eight points and a

team-high seven rebounds to go along with two blocks and a steal. Hughes, in his first game with the Black and Gold, finished with seven points, three assists,

two blocks and a steal.

From behind the arc, sophomore K.J. Cooper knocked down three three-point shots for all nine of his points on the night.

For West Virginia, fifth-year senior Jonnie West led the Mountaineers with 15 points, while Kevin Jones tallied 12 points and 10 rebounds for the hosts.

The Braves shot 34 percent from the field for the game against one of the better defenses in the Big East Conference, while also shooting just over 35 percent as a team from three-point land in the contest.

Defensively, UNCP held West Virginia to just 41 percent shooting from the field, but the Braves lost both the turnover and rebound battles.

The Braves gave away the basketball 21 times throughout the game, while the Mountaineers only committed 14 turnovers. West Virginia also finished the game with a 51-34 advantage on the glass rebounding the ball.

Thirteen Braves saw playing time against the Mountaineers, with seven players finishing with 17 minutes or more of action.

Braves hang tough against Division I foe Winthrop University

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A night after facing West Virginia, the UNCP men's basketball team continued its Division I exhibition road trip against the Winthrop Eagles in Rock Hill, S.C., on Nov. 6, with Braves losing 68-52.

The Braves were never fully in the contest, but were certainly not a push over for the Eagles either.

"I was disappointed. I think if we had played better, we were in it with a chance to win," UNCP head coach Ben Miller said afterwards.

"We got sloppy and turned the ball over. We didn't need to," sophomore George Blakeney said.

"That was a good experience. We matched up with them evenly," Blakeney added.

Junior Cody Hughes found himself at the top of the box score for the second straight night, finishing with a UNCP team-high 14 points, followed by Blakeney, who added 11 points inside for the Braves.

The Braves were cold from behind the arc throughout the game, finishing just 4-for-19 from three-point land, with three of the makes coming from Hughes.

Winthrop did not fare any better,

also shooting just over 21 percent from long range, making just three of their outside attempts.

Sophomore guard Shahmel Brackett also added 10 points for UNCP, while adding four rebounds and two assists for the Braves.

The Braves shot 34.6 percent from the floor for the game, while Winthrop finished the game just under 48 percent shooting as a team.

Winthrop out-rebounded the Braves 35-31 in the contest, led by freshman Julius Francis.

For the Eagles, Andre Jones scored 17 points to finish as the top scorer for Winthrop, who were Big South Conference Champions and an NCAA tournament team in 2010. The NCAA tournament appearance was Winthrop's ninth in the last 12 seasons.

George Valentine and Reggie Middleton finished with 13 and 12 points, respectively, to follow Jones on the Eagles stat sheet.

Winthrop had an 11-point advantage at halftime, leading 35-24.

In the second half, the Eagles stretched the lead to as many as 23 before the Braves held Winthrop scoreless over the game's last 4:02 to bring the game to its final score.



Braves guard Shahmel Brackett attempts a shot over West Virginia's Jonnie West on Nov. 5. Brackett finished with 10 points and four rebounds against Winthrop on Nov. 6.

Braves drop final exhibition matchup at home



UNCP senior Lamar Cross brings the ball up court as head coach Ben Miller and assistant coach Elden Miller look on.

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Sports Editor

In their final tune up for the 2010 season, the UNCP men's basketball team took to the court inside the English E. Jones Center as they hosted Athletes in Action on Nov. 11, with the visitors coming away with a 71-64 exhibition win.

Athletes in Action, an evangelical Christian sports ministry that travels around the world spreading their message, featured a 10-man roster that all played at the collegiate level, with six of those players having played professionally overseas.

"It's like playing at the gym with a bunch of older guys that know how to play basketball and run set plays," sophomore George Blakeney said of the visitors.

In the exhibition, the Braves shot just 33 percent from the field, while Athletes in Action hit 45 percent of their shots in the game.

Athletes in Action also stretched the floor on UNCP, with all five positions able to shoot outside jump shots as they finished the game shooting 36 percent from behind the three-point

line. By comparison, the Braves shot only 11 percent from behind the arc.

The outside shot helped Athletes in Action stay ahead on the scoreboard despite UNCP winning the rebound battle, pulling down 46 rebounds over Athletes in Action's 37 boards.

Athletes in Action also turned the ball over 20 times throughout the contest.

UNCP was led by junior Mike Robinson, who finished just short of a double-double as he contributed 10 points and nine rebounds to the Braves stat sheet.

Junior Cody Hughes and Blakeney both finished with 12 points, the high-point marks for the Braves in the contest.

Hughes added UNCP's only two made three-point shots in the game, while Blakeney pulled down seven rebounds, four of which were on the offensive side of the ball.

Sophomore Shahmel Brackett tallied eight points, five rebounds and a game-high four assists, while junior Nate Priest and sophomore Ty Alston each finished with seven points in the loss.