

Diamond Braves' season a winner in school's books

Continued from page 1B

Senior Kevin Dietrich stood up to the plate to take a hold of the top spot on the team from early on.

He currently leads in most statistical categories. His batting average as of April 18 was at a phenomenal .437 and has a .795 slugging percent.

Many of the younger players look up to the upperclassmen to learn the reigns before the seniors depart in May.

"They have carried us the entire way, but when I say that it isn't in the understanding of performance. They have kept the team together, give knowledge of the game to the younger players, and show us that as a team we are as good as anybody and anything is possible with the team this season," freshman teammate DJ Dean said.

Edmund Locklear, Jonathan Rivera and Ryan Kirkman will all be leaving as well.

Locklear will more than likely be replaced by Alex Pearce at catcher. Rivera and Kirkman, both right handed pitchers, already have a young line-up behind them to take over the mound.

"We do have players in mind currently that can fill the voids. To expect someone to do what someone like Kevin has done is unrealistic. You don't replace those types of players. You cannot expect somebody new to come in and be the same kind of person that was," O'Neil said.

Dietrich currently is in the running for the league's player of the year.

He does lead in several categories, and if he continues to play like he has, the award should be a breeze to win.

Tournament time

USC Aiken is the host for the 2009 Peach Belt Conference Tournament.

The games will begin May 9 and UNCP just recently punched their ticket in with two crucial wins in the Georgia College series.

Before the series, the



Freshman outfielder Josh Haley reaches for a ball in the team's series against No. 8 Georgia College.

Photo by Stephanie French

PBC was separated by just three games. In order for any one of the teams to make it to the post season tournament, any one loss could kick a team out of the running.

"Anybody can beat anybody in this league. You have to play very good baseball all the time. You can't take a weekend off, and you can't have a bad weekend. You better bring your best game possible every time," O'Neil said.

Standings as of April 20 have hot-hitting USC Aiken in first place, Francis Marion just a game behind in second

and Georgia College (15-9) and North Georgia (15-11) at third and fourth, respectively.

UNCP fell into the sixth place position at a 12-11 conference record.

UNCP will play host to the tournament April 24 and 25 for the final regular season games.

O'Neil and the players alike know that in order to secure that post-season seat, at least one win is necessary.

Eyeing next year

The coaching staff already has started looking at next season.

O'Neil announced his

2009-2010 signing class early in January. All seven of the players inked into the roster are from the state of North Carolina.

As the Braves will definitely lose two pitchers to graduation, O'Neil had to make some pitcher additions to the roster. Five of the incoming Braves are pitchers, the

others two are infielders.

"We keep recruiting all the way through the drop-add date in the fall semester to build as best of a team as possible," O'Neil said.

The team also knows what they need to work on for next year.

Dean thinks the most important aspect needing

work is the "team chemistry."

"Each and every player has room for improvement because we are not perfect in any way, shape or form. If everybody that is coming back gets just a little better, our team will be that much better. Only time will tell," Dean said.



UNCP sophomore Joe Mangum prepares to steal third base against Georgia College.

The Black and Gold team steps out of the dugout to congratulate Josh Pegram (right) after his homerun in the seventh inning in their second game against the Bobcats.

