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SPORTS

SECTION
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UNCP redshirt-freshman Mike Williams battles Newberry's Mike Rodgers in the 157-pound weight class. Williams won the matchup by a 4-1 decision.

Photo by Nick Phillips

Braves fall 25-12 in 'Battle of the Titans'

By Nick Phillips
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Anytime there is a matchup of teams ranked first and second, it's bound to be a good contest.

Second-ranked UNCP's Feb. 2 matchup against No. 1-ranked Newberry College did not disappoint. A great night of wrestling, highlighted by several marquee matchups, did not end up on the Braves' side, however, as Newberry posted a 25-12 victory.

One constant throughout the contest was the energy from the huge crowd. Whenever numbers one and two face off, in any sport, they draw a crowd, and this matchup was no different.

"I appreciated the crowd that we had. It was something we've probably never had, at least in a while," senior J.J. Davis said. "They came to see number one and number two compete, and we enjoyed it. We enjoyed it in the matches, the ooooh's and ahhh's, and the whole team was just excited about coming out and seeing the crowd. That got us pumped up even more."

Throughout the contest, several individual matches had one or both wrestlers

ranked in the regional rankings. Both teams also sported nationally ranked wrestlers, with the Braves' Davis ranked fifth in the country.

The Braves jumped out to an early lead with No. 4-ranked Brandon Bradley's 8-2 decision win over third ranked Blake Ridenour in the 149-pound matchup, followed by fourth-ranked Mike Williams' 4-1 decision win in the 157-pound contest.

Newberry got on the scoreboard with a 4-1 decision victory over senior Rashaad Saunders in the 165-pound match.

Number one-ranked J.J. Davis earned a hard fought, 6-4 overtime win over second-ranked Curtis Chenoweth in their 174-pound match before Newberry scored victories in the next three matches.

Weakley's upset

UNCP junior Russell Weakley, ranked second in the region, upset Matt Oliver in the 125-pound matchup with a 6-1 victory. Oliver holds the top spot in the region and the number seven spot nationally.

The loss snapped UNCP's five match winning streak, and finished off the Braves home portion of the schedule.

"This year we have been very good at taking things and leaving them behind. We don't get too high off our wins and we don't get too low off our losses. All in all, we can take some positives out of this loss," Davis said.

Super Regional payback

Although they didn't come out on top in this match, several Braves' wrestlers have the possibility of facing off against their Newberry foes down the road in the regional tournaments.

"We'll have guys coming in and watching video to see how they can improve to make those one or two point matches a win, or something that when it comes down to the end, it's a winnable match," Davis said. "It meant a lot for those guys to be able to measure themselves against someone who was ranked."

The Braves finish out the dual match season on Feb. 12 at Limestone, before traveling to Johnstown, Pa., to compete in the NCAA East Regional on Feb. 26 and 27.

Placing high enough there will send the wrestlers to the NCAA Division II National Championships held in Omaha, Neb.