

Black and Gold Player Spotlight

The Pine Needle sits down with UNCP track and field athlete Jessica McDowell as the 2010 season starts.

By Matt Smith
Sports Editor

What are your expectations of yourself and the team this season?

My expectations for myself are to break the long jump and hurdle records this year and to also make it to nationals for at least one of those events. I also want some of my teammates to make it to nationals this year.

Describe your experience as a UNCP student athlete.

It's really busy being a student athlete. We have to work twice as hard, especially since we travel a lot and have to miss a couple of classes. In the end it's all worth it because it's a life changing experience.

What is your most exciting track and field moment?

My most exciting track and field moment was last year at our last meet when I jumped 5.50 meters in the long jump. [It was] the first time I actually was in the air while doing the long jump.

What is it like being part of a team, but also competing individually in most events?

We get to push ourselves to meet the goals we set out to accomplish in our events while encouraging teammates to do the same. We still have to work as a team like the other sports and that's what I like about track.

Who/what are your biggest track and field inspirations?

I really don't know much about track, not as most as my teammates, but I would have to say Coach [Jeff] Moody is my biggest track and field inspiration. He's always motivating us to set that goal and reach it and to have fun while doing it.

What do you do personally before a meet?

I just try to not think about it too much and to just relax.

What was the last movie you watched?

The last movie I watched was *Avatar*.



Photo courtesy of UNCP Sports Information

Bio of the week Jessica McDowell

2009 Season

In 2009, McDowell made UNCP history by breaking two school records. McDowell set the school record 100 meter hurdles and the long jump. McDowell placed first at both of these events at the annual UNCP Track and Field Classic.

Braves announce football coaching changes

By Matt Smith
Sports Editor

The UNCP football team announced two coaching changes on Feb. 24, as head coach Pete Shinnick promoted offensive line coach Steve Saulnier and quarterback coach Geoff Buffum.

Saulnier was named Shinnick's assistant head coach, while Buffum was announced as the team's new offensive coordinator. Both coaches will remain at their current positions as well as taking

on responsibilities assigned to their new roles.

"The title changes really reflect what Steve Saulnier and Geoff Buffum have been doing for this program," Shinnick said. "Steve has been taking on a lot of administrative duties, and Geoff has really taken the lead with our offense. With that said, I wanted to make sure their titles reflected the hard work they have put in. I am excited for them both."

In 2009 under

Saulnier, the Braves gained 2,549 yard rushing on 473 attempts. The Black and Gold's rush attack accounted for 28 touchdowns. The offensive line also only allowed 10 sacks for the entire season.

Rushing attack

The Braves finished in the top-10 in sacks allowed last year, while finishing ninth in the country in rushing offense.

Thanks to Saulnier's work with the offensive

line, sophomore running back Travis Daniels became the program's first ever 1,000-yard rusher, amassing 1,058 yards this season. Daniels was named the team's most valuable player in 2009.

Under Buffum, the Braves' air attack also saw improvement in 2009. The Braves gained 2,020 yards through the air last season with 19 total touchdowns. The Black and Gold averaged 183.6 yards per game while throwing just five interceptions in 2009.

Last season under Buffum, junior quarterback Cory Smith posted a 139.8 quarterback rating while completing almost 65 percent of his passes. Smith finished the year with 1,784 total passing yards and 17 touchdowns.

Buffum said that while he is excited about the change, he believes that the coaching team will still have a sense of continuity that will help the program in 2010.

"I really don't see too much changing," Buffum said. "I am very comfort-

able working with Coach Shinnick and Saulnier on the offense; our team has been very successful the last two years and we hope that will continue for a long time. The ingredients for a very successful season are here. We just have to execute all phases of our program at a high level."

The Braves' began their spring campaign March 2 and the annual Black and Gold Spring Game will be held April 8 at 6 p.m. at Grace P. Johnson Stadium.

Cross country runners make All-Academic team

By Matt Smith
Sports Editor

Two UNCP men's cross country runners earned a coveted academic honor Feb. 25, as freshman Pardon Ndhlovu and sophomore Kevin Clancy were named to the Division II Male Cross Country All-Academic Team.

The award, given out by the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association, awards the top academic runners in the nation.

To earn the All-Academic team distinction, a candidate must have completed at least 12 semester hours and have a 3.25 cumulative grade point average. The runners must also place in the top 30 percent of the total number of athletes eligible at their regional cham-

pionship or place in the top 50 percent at the NCAA Division II Cross Country Championship.

In 2009, Ndhlovu burst onto the cross country scene for UNCP, posting seven top-10 finishes for the Black and Gold in his first season. Ndhlovu posted first place finishes in three events in 2009, taking home top honors at the Sept. 3 UNCP Invitational, Sept. 11 Seahawk Invitational and the Sept. 19 ECU Pirates Invitational.

At the Peach Belt Cross Country Championships held Oct. 24 at Luther Britt Park in Lumberton, Ndhlovu finished second at the event with a time of 14:57.00. The freshman placed fifth at the NCAA Cross Country Regionals and earned a 30th place finish at the Nov. 21 NCAA

Cross Country Championship in Evansville, Ind.

Joining Ndhlovu on the All-Academic team, Clancy helped lead the Black and Gold to two team championships in 2009.

Clancy posted a 10th place finish at the Oct. 9 Mount Olive Invitational and a 19th place finish at the PBC Championship.

The Braves finished with two team titles last season, taking individual honors at the UNCP Invitational and the Mount Olive Invitational.

As a conference, the Peach Belt has seven athletes qualify for the All-Academic team, with four runners from Columbus State and a runner from Clayton State joining the two Braves.



Photo by Tony Lewis

Black and Gold freshman Pardon Ndhlovu runs during the PBC championships. Ndhlovu and teammate Kevin Clancy were named to the Division II Male Cross Country All-Academic team.