



Photo by Gabe Ainslie- Photography Staff

Sophomore Andrew Kirkland slides into the base in the game against Western Carolina on March 21 at McCormick Field.

## Bulldogs fall to Radford in three-game series

**Randal Walton**

rwalton@unca.edu - Staff Writer

Inclement, rainy weather and a fiercely competitive opponent plagued the Bulldogs as they played a consecutive three game series against Big South rival Radford University last weekend.

"These three games are conference games and they're extremely important," said **Tom Smith, head baseball coach**, before the games. "They determine what we do at the end of the season. Our ranking in the conference determines if we get invited to conference tournament. We have to get a good practice in and review the fundamentals."

Conference games, no matter the opponent, all carry the same weight, said **junior catcher Ian Graham**.

"The Radford games are just as important as any other conference series," he said. "They count towards our teams standing in the conference tournament at the end of the year."

The team also sees Radford as a strong opponent, Smith said.

"They finished in top third of the conference last year. They're regularly at the top,"

the Asheville-native said. "We're going to have to pitch well, get timely hits on offense and execute when we have the opportunity."

Pitching determines the winner of the series, becoming the most important element of the three games, especially with rain pelting down on them, Smith said.

"It's going to be a matchup of pitching depth and overall team depth with offensive players," the 57-year-old said. "It's better judgment. Instead of having one pitcher dominate, you've got to have two or three pitchers."

The Bulldogs fell to the Highlanders on Friday with a score of 1-16, on Saturday with a score of 0-9 and on Sunday with a score of 1-2. The losses mark the first time the Bulldogs fell to an opponent in the Big South Conference, putting their overall record at 12-13 and their conference record at 3-3.

The three-game sweep also marks the fourth consecutive year of Radford sweeping the Bulldogs. The Highlanders have now won 12 games in a row against UNC Asheville.

Rain came hard, but the team did not allow themselves to drown, Graham said.

"The weather didn't really have an effect on the games, overall, but rain always is an obstacle any baseball team has to deal with," said the Virginia Beach, Va., native. "It's nothing new."

Despite the dreary conditions, the game plan called for simplicity and sparks, Smith said.

"We need a lot of energy and we need to go out, execute well and win three games," he said. "A three-game streak, that's what we go for."

Every weekend provides the opportunity for wins, Graham said.

"Our team's goal is to always take at least two out of three games every weekend," said the business administration student.

Radford crushed UNCA's dreams of a winning streak by restraining their offense.

On Friday, the Bulldog's offense stalled. Only four players reached base the entire night.

"Radford played very well offensively, defensively and on the mound this weekend," Graham said. "Our pitching did very well. We were just throwing to some hot Radford bats."

Saturday's game produced the same lack of offense, ac-

ording to University Athletics Officials. Leading the offense, Graham got three hits out of the four times he came up to bat. **Right-handed pitcher Brian Connolly**, credited with the loss, played four innings and allowed three runs on five hits.

"Radford proved to be a strong opponent, but nothing we couldn't handle in the conference tournament," Graham said.

Though Sunday's score appeared significantly better than the previous two games, Radford still managed to hold back the Bulldogs. Pitcher Dean Roland allowed only six hits and struck out seven hitters, pitching for 10 shutout innings. Radford and UNCA remained tied with one run apiece until the 14th inning, when Radford's Josh Gardiner produced the game winning hit.

The three-game losing streak against a conference rival empowers the team, Graham said. Now, the team's remains focused on their next encounter with a Big South Conference rival.

"Our team will use this week's mid-week game and practices as an opportunity to improve for next weekend's conference series," he said.

### Bulldog Scorecard

## Baseball

- March 20 vs. ETSU 1-3 (L)

- March 21 vs. Western Carolina 3-1 (W)

- Friday vs. Radford 0-16(L)

- Saturday vs. Radford 0-9(L)

- Sunday vs. Radford 1-2(L)