In football, as in cooking, a little seasoning can go a long way. A pinch of salt and a dash of pepper can turn an ordinary dish into a blue ribbon taster’s choice.

That same theory applied to the 2010 Muhlenberg football team. After suffering through a down year with plenty of underclassmen thrust into important roles last fall, the Mules returned 16 starters to a team that was picked to finish sixth in the Centennial Conference preseason poll.

But what those voters did not know was that the 2009 season had given the Mules the proper experience to go along with some quality ingredients, and the result was a recipe for success.

The Mules returned to their winning ways with a 7-4 record, including a 7-2 mark in conference play to capture sweetest prize of all: a record-tying ninth CC title.

After dropping the season opener to nationally ranked Delaware Valley, the Mules used a pair of red zone defensive stands and a late fourth-and-1 conversion deep in their own territory to win at Susquehanna, 21-14.

The drama continued the following week against Gettysburg. The Mules were poised to ice the game when they lined up to punt with hopes of pinning the Bullets deep with less than a minute to play.

That’s when near-disaster struck. The snap sailed over the punter’s head and eventually landed in the hands of a Bullet player who appeared ready to score a game-winning touchdown. But Muhlenberg reserve tight end Drew Brantner never gave up on the play and tracked down the ball carrier at the 7-yard line. The Mule defense held, forcing Gettysburg to settle for a field goal to send the game into overtime. From there, Muhlenberg’s defense forced a turnover, and the offense scored on its first play to cap a dramatic Homecoming win.

Brantner’s play not only saved the game, but it may have saved the season as well. The following week Muhlenberg forced five turnovers, including an interception return for touchdown, to beat defending CC champion Johns Hopkins, 30-27, in Baltimore.

After a pair of easy wins over Juniata and McDaniel, the Mules suffered their first conference loss of the season against Franklin & Marshall. But Muhlenberg bounced back with a 26-13 win at Dickinson to set up a first-place showdown in against Ursinus with a share of the CC championship on the line in Allentown.
Donning their all-red uniforms reserved only for special occasions, the Mules led by one at the half and then scored twice in the third quarter to extend the lead to 14. The defense stopped Ursinus short on fourth down with less than two minutes to play to preserve the 27-20 win and clinch the school’s sixth trip to the NCAA Tournament in the past 10 years.

While the year ended with back-to-back losses to Moravian and Wesley, the season still marked a return to the top of the conference for one of the most successful programs in the CC.

And with its success Muhlenberg landed eight players on the all-conference team, including five first-team selections to bring the Mules’ all-time total to a CC-high 119 first-teamers. Head coach Mike Donnelly was also named the conference’s coach of the year for the second time in three seasons.

On top of being a first-team selection, linebacker Patrick McDonough was also named the conference’s defensive player of the year, becoming the fourth Mule linebacker to earn that award. The senior captain was also named second-team All-America and first-team All-South Region after registering 105 tackles and 5.5 tackles for loss.

McDonough was joined on the all-region team by defensive end Kenneth Cobb. The speedy pass rusher was a second-team regional choice and first-team All-CC performer after setting a school record with 11 sacks on the season. He also led the team with 16.5 tackles for loss and added 7 pass breakups.

Defensive back Chris Hartzell (58 tackles, 11 passes defended), running back Terrence Dandridge (1,068 yards, 11 TDs) and center Michael Porembski were also named first-team All-CC.

Second-team honors went to offensive guard Mark Bigelli, linebacker Mark Accomando (60 tackles, 5 for loss) and defensive back Chase Nadell (51 tackles, 3 interceptions). Nadell was also named the second-team kick returner after he finished fifth in the country with an average of 29.5 yards per return.

Seniors John Allen and Lou Greco teamed with Porembski, Bigelli junior Phil Musick and sophomore Garrett Bisbing to form an offensive line that paved the way for the second-highest rushing attack in the conference (153.5 yards per game).

Sophomore quarterback Dan Deighan threw for 1,704 yards and 12 touchdowns, while also rushing for 324 yards and 5 scores in his second season under center.

Fellow sophomore Isaiah Vaughn, a converted defensive back, quickly became Deighan’s favorite target, finishing with a team-high 42 catches for 567 yards and 5 touchdowns, including the game-winner against Gettysburg.

Seniors Bobby Bushong (30 receptions, 352 yards, 1 touchdown) and Jon Liberty (29 receptions, 340 yards, 2 touchdowns) capped their Mule careers with a pair of solid seasons.

Defensively, senior Scott Gavin (42 tackles) joined his fellow captains, McDonough and Accomando, and junior Matt Musick (47 tackles, 5.5 for loss) to form another tough corps of Mule linebackers.

Senior Harrison Rowner (3.5 tackles for loss) and juniors Mark Mounayar (31 tackles), Matthew Siedt (33 tackles, 4.5 for loss) and Victor Taiwo (23 tackles, 2.5 for loss) formed a defensive line that yielded only 91.7 rushing yards per conference game.

The secondary, comprised of juniors Hartzell, Nadell and Kevin Ryan (team-high 4 interceptions), along with sophomores Shane O’Connor (45 tackles, 5 pass breakups) and Tim Vogel (18 tackles), allowed only 160.8 passing yards per game in CC play.

On special teams, Michael Katz became the first kicker in Mule history to connect on three field goals of at least 40 yards when he made kicks of 40, 44 and a career-long 46 yards against McDaniel. His 27 career field goals are tied for the most ever by a Mule, while his 161 points are good for second place in Muhlenberg history. Senior Jason LoPipero pinned 11 of his 29 punts inside the opponent’s 20-yard line before suffering a season-ending injury against F&M.