

THE PENDULUM

FALL SPORTS PREVIEW



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THE PENDULUM

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Common factor

Elon soccer teams move past abnormal years

Andrew Wilson
Sports Editor

During the 2012 NCAA soccer season, Elon University watched one team sweep the Southern Conference regular season and tournament championships on its way to a second straight NCAA tournament appearance. The other team struggled through a serious injury bug and dropped a heartbreaker in the final seconds of the conference tournament semifinals.

About the only thing the Elon men's and women's soccer teams had in common last season was that both Darren Powell, the head coach of the men's team, and Chris Neal, the head coach on the women's side, won conference Coach of the Year honors.

Powell was almost a lock for the award given his team's success and the national attention Elon drew, due in large part to its rigorous schedule and then-senior Chris Thomas' natural ability to put the ball in the back of the net to the tune of 23 times on the year — a mark that led the nation.

Neal earned the honor by keeping the injury-riddled Phoenix together to compete in conference play and make a run at a title, even though there were questions as to whether he and his staff

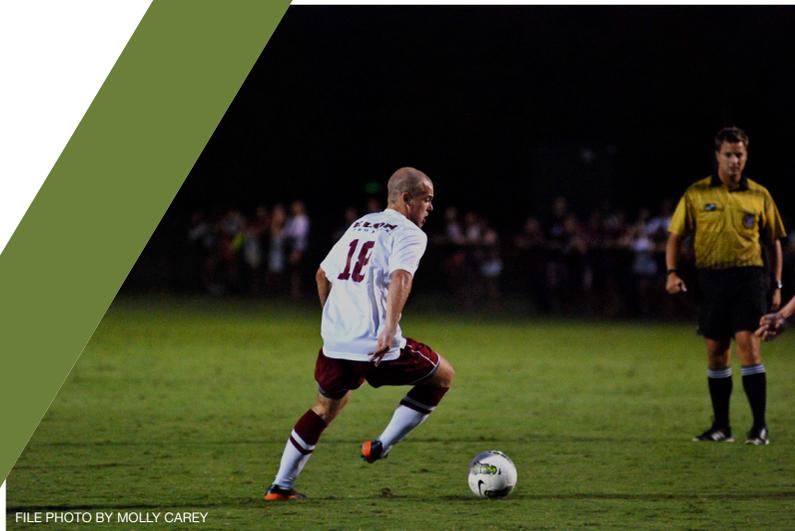
would be able to field a team at all on any given night.

Although the women made the semifinals of the Southern Conference tournament, the number of goals being scored lacked. Heavily.

Powered by then-junior Simi Dhaliwal, who led the team with three goals on the season, the women scored a total of 23 goals in 22 games — the same mark Thomas tallied all by himself.

With a new year upon them, both teams find themselves in the same boat — in search of goal scorers to take the reins and navigate the Phoenix through the final season of Southern Conference play before taking off for the Colonial Athletic Association.

Neal and his staff brought in a recruiting class of 12 freshmen after numerous severe injuries plagued the Phoenix a season ago. Only six players saw minutes in all 22 games on the year, with just



FILE PHOTO BY MOLLY CAREY



FILE PHOTO BY MOLLY CAREY



two starting every game — Shannon Foley and Claire O’Keeffe. Both have since departed the program after graduating in May.

With fears the Phoenix wouldn’t be able to play a full team of 11 players Friday nights after a week of training, the intensity levels in practice suffered, causing goals to come few and far between throughout the season.

“We had to bubble wrap what healthy players we had between Sunday and Friday just so we could play a game last year,” Neal said. “We were handcuffed. We could only do so much in training from an intensity standpoint for fear that we may not be able to field a team on Friday nights.”

With 33 healthy players entering the 2013 season, “safe” and “low intensity” are not a part of the plan anymore for Neal and the Phoenix.

“This year, right away in preseason, it looks like a different planet from an intensity standpoint,” Neal said. “The players know playing

time is on the line every practice. That’s the big difference from last year to this year — the level we can go to in training and not have to worry about not putting a team out. What we’ve seen already is remarkable.”

Senior forward Catherine Brinkman was one of the many players who found herself rotating in and out of the lineup a season ago with various injuries throughout the year. With one season left for her to right the ship and prove she can lead the Phoenix, Brinkman’s drive to finish her career on the right note with a strong, competitive senior season is not far off, according to Neal.

“Catherine is in the best shape she’s ever been in in her four years at Elon,” Neal said. “She seems more focused. I think she recognizes the fact that it’s her senior year. This is it. That’s sunk in for her. She continues to focus on her fitness and because of that, she’s going to score more goals.”

Brinkman knows the importance of getting back to the form she played with during her sophomore season — one in

which she led the Phoenix in goals scored.

“We’re going to score more goals than we have in the last three years,” Brinkman said. “We have to win. That’s where we’ve slacked these last three years — in the goal scoring area. We can shut out any team, but the goal scoring has been light the last few years.”

With a returning core and a large freshman class, Neal said he believes there are multiple players on his roster that could boost the Phoenix to the next level.

“There’s not a Chris Thomas that comes around very often and scores 23 goals,” Neal said. “But I really expect to have multiple players with somewhere between eight to 12 goals. That’s the goal. If you’ve got multiple people that are putting up eight goals a year, that’s good times. In 2011, we might have had five players somewhere between three to six. We need five or six players with six or more goals. And we’re capable of that. Kendall Stanley, or Catherine Brinkman, or potentially one of the freshmen or somebody that just has the ball bounce

the right way can score 15 goals. And Simi Dhaliwal, too. She’s definitely one of the players that can score a lot of goals.”

On the flip side, Powell brought in a class designed to help the returning core of players fill the void left by Thomas at the top.

“We recruited them to help the team and improve the team at each position they individually play,” Powell said. “It’s a pretty solid group for each and every player. It’s a very similar class to previous years. They’re a very solid group of individuals — good characters, good in the classroom. Now they have to figure out how they’re going to fit into the team. They have to earn the right to get onto the field.”

While senior midfielder Daniel Lovitz knows how much of a luxury it was having Thomas putting seemingly every ball into the back of the net, he said he thinks the Phoenix has the core to succeed without Thomas as long as the team can find its footing early on.

“We have to create an identity as early as possible on the team,” he said. “If we

get that core group out there on the field and get the depth mixed in, the sooner we get that identity and the sooner we can establish ourselves in the game and can start winning games comfortably.”

A key to finding the team’s identity is getting off to a running start, according to junior goalkeeper Nathan Dean, is getting off to a running start.

“We had a fairly decent start last year, but it’s always something that we’ve been lacking a little bit,” he said. “We’ve prepared pretty well and if we can get off to a strong start, I think that will really set us up well for the season.”

Another key to success is finding a way to duplicate late results — something the Phoenix enjoyed multiple times in 2012 on the way to a 15-5-2 record.

“We really have to replicate some of the last-minute results we had last year,” Lovitz said. “That really was an application of our attitude and our fitness levels coming to the end of these really tough, grueling games where we were able to nudge it out. Luckily we were on the receiving end of a lot of that good fortune, but we need to replicate that whichever way we can because that is going to be a big factor for us as a team.”

With the departure of the College of Charleston from the Southern Conference, conference matches have become all that much more important, especially for the men’s team, with only six teams in play.

Powell acknowledged the reshuffling taking its toll on the Phoenix, saying with less conference games to play, each becomes that much more important toward the end of season standings.

“It’s a little tight this year,” Powell said. “There’s less games. That’s one thing we’ll talk about as a group with Charleston leaving is now there’s only six games, so those points are a premium. So every time you step on the field now against a conference team, it really is almost like a championship game, and we need to approach it that way so we maximize in the points we get.”

Dean said the team knows the challenge, but it will not be too much of an obstacle for the Phoenix because of their mentality from years past.

“It does make them a little more important,” Dean said. “We always take conference games very seriously, though, so it’s hard to say they’re more important this year. But in terms of racking up the

points and getting to that first spot, we need to do it sooner, and it definitely makes every game a little bit more important if that’s possible.”

With the women looking for their fifth straight winning season in Southern Conference play and the men looking for their eighth in the last nine years, the two teams also come together with one common goal: taking the SoCon trophies and running to the Colonial Athletic Association. And no, it’s not out of the question.

“This year is going to be a difficult task in terms of everybody is very aware of our team and our program,” Powell said. “That’s a new challenge for us. But it’s also an exciter for us. And we believe we can get it done.”

The women were stung at the end of last season in the semifinals of the conference tournament with a loss against Georgia Southern, which has not fallen off Brinkman’s radar.

“I still remember that like it was yesterday,” Brinkman said. “I was kind of happy for them in a weird way. They were the No. 8 seed, but every single team in our conference is so close and I just want all of them this year. It would definitely be sweet to beat the champs, though.”

While senior captain Jennifer McGorty isn’t hanging onto the loss, she knows the importance of putting the game out of memory, at least for the time being, in hopes of a better result this year.

“There’s so much that is new this year so it’s kind of hard to go into the season dwelling on the past and what happened last year,” she said. “I’m not even worrying about the past. I’m just worrying about what’s about to happen this year.”

One thing McGorty is thinking about, though, is returning to the semifinals with a goal of going beyond that game.

“When I get to the semifinals this year, it’s going to mean that much more after what happened last season,” she said. “I don’t care if it’s Georgia Southern on the other side or whoever it is. When I get to that semifinal, it’s going to mean so much more because we want this and we want to move on. Bad.”

The men don’t have to worry about beating the champs. Instead, they’re the team with the target on their backs after taking back-to-back conference tournament championships.

“We just have to not even think about last year or the year before that or the



FILE PHOTO BY AL DRAGO

year before that,” said senior midfielder Matt Wescoe. “We just have to focus on what’s ahead of us and put in the work to be the best team that we possibly can be and compete to win all of our games.”

While both coaches acknowledged there’s still an entire season to be played before either can start thinking about competition in the CAA, they both know how much it would mean for both programs to take the SoCon trophies in

their final season of contention.

“It doesn’t get any sweeter than winning in your last year,” Neal said. “There’s nothing worse than losing a fight and knowing you’re not going to get another chance. We want to be the one that wins and walks away and no one gets another shot at us. So steal the trophy and leave town. That’s the idea.”

FILLING THE GAPS

Men's soccer looks to replace holes left by Thomas, Latigue

Andrew Wilson
Sports Editor

The holes in the Elon University men's soccer team are very visible at a time when the Phoenix can least afford them.

Coming off arguably the most successful season in program history, one in which then-senior Chris Thomas led the nation in goals scored with 23, the Phoenix enters 2013 as not only a team with a target on its back in the Southern Conference, but a team that can no longer slide under the radar and sneak up on nationally ranked programs.

Thomas and Gabe Latigue, one of the anchors of the midfield from a season ago, are no longer donning the Elon uniform, which could be cause for concern with another tough schedule on tap and vital holes needing to be plugged.

"Everybody now is more aware of our team and our program," said Elon head coach Darren Powell. "Those two had exceptional years last year and were great ambassadors for our program over the years and did some great things with great achievements. But now, the journey of college sports changes annually so we'll be different from last year as it was different from the year before that and in previous years."

According to Powell, the key to filling the holes left by Thomas and Latigue is not finding a new go-to striker or a new anchor in the middle, but finding a team identity.

"The main thing we need to focus on right now is establishing who we're going to be as a team," Powell said. "Who is going to step forward? Is it going to be one individual or is it going to become the task throughout the whole team?"

In 2012, the Phoenix used multiple formations depending on who was on the field at the time. Senior midfielder Daniel Lovitz said he believes that will help the Phoenix continue the on-field success Elon has enjoyed in recent years.

"One of the great things about the way Darren coaches is our method of play — our style," Lovitz said. "It creates a lot of chances. Obviously last year, we had a dominant forward who was putting most of those chances away, but we didn't really have the depth at the position."

Junior goalkeeper Nathan Dean echoed Lovitz, saying the way Powell coached last season has set the Phoenix up for success, even without a central goal scorer like Thomas.

"We know it's not easy to replace people like Chris and Gabe, but I think one of the things we did a lot last year was change the formation around quite a bit," Dean said. "One of our strengths is we were adaptable in the way we played and that will help us this year because it's not as straightforward and going through one guy."

While the Phoenix used two preseason games against perennial powerhouse University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of South Carolina, Lovitz and Powell believe with the incoming freshman class combined with the returning players from a year ago, there won't be one clear go-to option. It'll be more of a "whoever is open" mentality.

"We have a plethora of a lot of attacking players that are going to be able to contribute," Lovitz said. "If they're in form and get sharp, we're still going to be generating those chances and putting goals in the back of the net. I just look forward to more of the same and maybe even distributing the goals a little more evenly throughout the team, which has always been our goal."

Powell took it one step further than Lovitz, saying with the personnel the Phoenix will put on the field this fall, there won't be another Thomas-esque season in 2013.

"Knowing the group of players we've got returning, it'll be a throughout-the-team job and not resting with one player like Thomas," Powell said.

Senior midfielder Matt Wescoe tallied seven assists last season, all of which found Thomas on the other end.

This year, with the multiple options the Phoenix has up front, Wescoe said there isn't a central target he's looking for on a cross. Instead, his target is much simpler

than finding one player in particular. And he's using his coach's philosophy on goal scorers for the season.

"Whoever's open," he said.



FILE PHOTO BY AL DRAGO

Lovitz recalls life as a black belt

Kyle Maher
Senior Reporter

Senior midfielder Daniel Lovitz of the Elon University men's soccer team is a man of many talents, most of which he's put in his rearview mirror as he prepares for his last season in maroon and gold. But as he looks back on his time as a martial arts student, he recalls his passion for the activity he had once vehemently pursued — and it's not exactly mainstream.

"[Karate] was really something that my parents got me into when I was younger," Lovitz said. "I started when I was 4 — about the same age I actually started playing soccer — and it was really, to be fair, more of a commitment than soccer was for the first many years of my life. I was going two or three times a week for about an hour or two hours, progressing and getting to the next belt. I had a great group of people and family friends and kids around my

age — even people from the neighborhood — that were doing the same thing at the same time."

The decision was mutual, Lovitz said, because of his interest in the sport and his parents' concern about his safety around his friends and in school.

"I was much smaller when I was a kid compared to all of my friends and I would always come home with little knocks and bruises from getting bullied around a little bit," Lovitz said. "Nothing terrible, but my parents thought it would be cool and I thought it would be cool because I loved watching Bruce Lee movies and all that stuff — I was into it so I wasn't complaining. I thought it was awesome to do it."

He learned several different forms of karate, but it was the simplest form that he took with him into his future endeavors, including soccer.

"There's tons of different types of karate. I

used to know how to do many more, but [the most common was] called kenpo karate," Lovitz said. "It was all ex-cops teaching us and people from the neighborhood we knew — pretty much those were the people we knew not to screw around with. A lot of people think about karate and think about crazy stuff, mainly Asian influence, but really it was kind of just teaching young kids in the neighborhood how to defend themselves. It was so cool to actually follow through and go through all the steps and really grow. I actually learned most of my dedication and hard work from karate."

After years of diligent work, Lovitz rose in rank and eventually earned his preliminary black belt. It was then he decided to drop the sport that had consumed his life for so long in order to concentrate on other obligations.

"It kind of got to the point where I was playing baseball competitively and that was going really well at the time. Soccer was always such a huge part of my life and once I got to the black belt, I had the choice of going for the next degree of black belt and keep increasing it or stop," he said. "To be fair, a lot of the people I was doing it with just wanted to say they got the black belt and just kind of peel off from there, and it didn't seem like a bad option at the time."

Lovitz then reassessed his priorities and discovered his love for karate had waned.

"Do I regret it? Maybe a little bit," he said. "It was such a cool thing to be able to do for that long a period of time. I was grateful for it, but definitely once I got to black belt, once I was 14, I kind of let it go and focused more on soccer and baseball."

Lovitz then stuck with baseball and lacrosse in middle school before gravitating to soccer.

"Baseball kind of fizzled out and I got into lacrosse, but then soccer kind of just took the reins throughout high school and luckily it ended with me here," Lovitz said. "I can't really complain too much at all."

Now, with his karate career a distant memory, Lovitz uses the sport as a way to connect with his fellow classmates, believing his prowess is a good conversation starter.

"You know how you always need an ice breaker at the beginning of every class? It's always good to be able to pull that one out of your back pocket," Lovitz said. "People always ask me, 'Can you do a move?' or 'Could you do something?' and I'm like, 'No, I'll hurt myself.' I'm sure something would go wrong now if I tried it because I've lost touch with it, but it was such a cool experience."



Men's Soccer Schedule

UNCW Classic v. Mercer[^]
Sept. 6, 5 p.m. — Wilmington, N.C.

UNCW Classic v. Presbyterian[^]
Sept. 8, 1 p.m. — Wilmington, N.C.

v. UNC Wilmington
Sept. 14, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Wake Forest
Sept. 17, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. William & Mary
Sept. 20, 7:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Radford
Sept. 25, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ High Point
Sept. 28, 7 p.m. — High Point, N.C.

@ Campbell
Oct. 1, 7 p.m. — Buies Creek, N.C.

v. Appalachian State*
Oct. 5, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Wofford*
Oct. 12, 7 p.m. — Buies Creek, N.C.

v. Georgia Southern*
Oct. 15, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Furman*
Oct. 19, 7 p.m. — Greenville, S.C.

@ Duke*
Oct. 22, 7 p.m. — Durham, N.C.

@ Davidson*
Oct. 26, 7 p.m. — Davidson, N.C.

v. Coastal Carolina
Oct. 29, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. UNCG*
Nov. 2, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

SoCon Quarterfinals
Nov. 9, TBA

SoCon Championships
Nov. 15 – 17, TBA – Greenville, S.C.

Women's soccer leadership

Andrew Wilson
Sports Editor

Only six players competed in all 22 of the Elon University women's soccer team's matches during the 2012 season. Of those six, only two started every game — Shannon Foley and Claire O'Keeffe.

Both senior captains throughout their final seasons with the team, Foley and O'Keeffe have since graduated and passed the reins on to a group of four more captains.

Tasked with transitioning the 12 freshmen

and two transfers, seniors Jennifer McGorty and Olivia Mackey and juniors Raychel Diver and Kate Murphy began the process of acclimating the group early in preseason with an assist from Greek Life by using the big/little system.

"They started, much like a sorority, a big sister/little sister-type program within the team," said Elon head coach Chris Neal. "They have given the younger players someone to ask questions to and hang out with and to ask for advice. They just get it. They understand how important it is for the team to mesh."

With 34 players on the team, each of the players are in small groups, which McGorty said has helped chemistry build quickly throughout the team.

"Each freshman is with a senior or a junior or a sophomore," she said. "And we'll do little activities within those groups which are really bringing this team together."

McGorty also said she and Diver, who entered

the program before the 2010 season, have an easier time leading the large team this season because of previous experience they had their freshmen years, when both entered as part of a class of 10 players.

"We came in with 10 and we were a big class then," McGorty said. "To be honest, it's a little bit easier for us just because we came in with a big class and they're coming in with a big class, so we can relate easier as captains compared to past captains."

Before each season, Neal said the team sets goals they want to accomplish throughout the year. Those goal are usually split into categories: non-conference, conference, community and academic.

This season, with such a large team, the Phoenix added another category: chemistry.

"We've made it very obvious that the larger the group, the harder team chemistry is to accomplish," Neal said. "The girls have done just an incredible job — spearheaded by the captains, specifically



brings Greek life to Rudd Field

Jennifer McGorty — they're doing stuff for team chemistry that we didn't direct them to do. They're taking it upon themselves."

Though not a captain, senior forward Catherine Brinkman will also play a key role in not only helping acclimate the freshmen, but by playing a big part on the field.

As a sophomore in 2011, Brinkman led the Phoenix in goals with five on the season. Throughout her junior season

in 2012, she tallied just twice in 10 games while battling multiple injuries throughout the year. Not to mention, she started the first two games of the season in goal, as both keepers were injured at the start of the year.

While Neal has high hopes for the forward in her final year with the Phoenix, Brinkman is eager to regain the form she had in 2011 and expand on it.

"I was here a lot of the summer working with a lot of my teammates, especially a

lot of the injured girls," Brinkman said. "I'm really excited to get this started and hopefully be injury-free and get back at what I love doing."

With all of the issues the Phoenix was forced to overcome last season, Neal believes the adversity and hardships Elon worked through will only help the team this year — especially the upperclassmen who now know how to fight through constant bad breaks.

"The interesting thing about last year

is if you look at the schedule from start to finish and looking at the first half of that schedule and the last half of that schedule, it's like two different teams played the schedule," Neal said. "That was an interesting dynamic last year to see how the team overcame diversity, got better and grew and found ways to win late in the year and put ourselves in a position to win a championship and we were really close. That will go miles for our team this season. Miles."



Women's Soccer Schedule

v. Charlotte

Sept. 1, PPD — Elon, N.C.

v. High Point

Sept. 8, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Longwood

Sept. 13, 5 p.m. — Wilmington, N.C.

@ Texas A&M - Corpus Christi

Sept. 15, 12 p.m. — Wilmington, N.C.

v. Liberty

Sept. 20, 5:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ VCU

Sept. 22, 1 p.m. — Richmond, Va.

v. Western Carolina*

Sept. 26, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Appalachian State*

Sept. 29, 2 p.m. — Boone, N.C.

@ The Citadel*

Oct. 4, 4 p.m. — Charleston, S.C.

@ Francis Marion

Oct. 6, 2 p.m. — Florence, S.C.

v. Wofford*

Oct. 11, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Furman*

Oct. 13, 2 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Georgia Southern*

Oct. 18, 7 p.m. — Statesboro, Ga.

@ Davidson*

Oct. 20, 2 p.m. — Davidson, N.C.

v. Chattanooga*

Oct. 25, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Samford*

Oct. 27, 2 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ UNCG*

Oct. 30, 7 p.m. — Greensboro, N.C.

SoCon Quarterfinals

Nov. 3, TBD — Spartanburg, S.C.

SoCon Championships

Nov. 8 – 10, TBD — Spartanburg, S.C.

Chris Neal brings in class of 12 for 2013 soccer season

Andrew Wilson
Sports Editor

Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion states, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Little did Newton know, his law would be used for more than just science.

The Elon University women's soccer team brought the law into the world of sports with its 2013 recruiting class — one that features 12 new additions to the team as well as two transfers, both of which came from Clemson University.

With numerous knee injuries, including multiple torn ACLs in 2012, the Phoenix had a lot of question marks entering the season — ones that could only be remedied by bringing in more recruits as insurance.

"Initially, the recruiting class started off as a smaller class," said Elon head coach Chris Neal. "Then all of the injuries started piling up and it got bigger by design. We knew we had a lot of kids coming off knee injuries and surgeries so they were big question marks. We didn't want to put ourselves in the same situation as last year."

With 12 capable freshmen entering the fold, the existing injuries became less of question marks and more of periods, largely for the better.

"[Sophomore defender] Mel Insley still is recovering from a torn ACL in the spring against [University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill," Neal said. "Other than that, we have 33 healthy bodies. The things we can do this year compared to last year are night and day."

Senior forward Catherine Brinkman agreed with Neal, saying injuries from last season are not really a factor this season.

"We look really strong," she said. "The returning ACL injuries and any of the prior knee injuries look fit and healthy and really strong and we're excited to have them back."

Murphy's law reads, "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." According to Brinkman, that defines the 2012 Phoenix to a T. The other side of the law could also describe the current state of the 2013 team.

"Teams that have bad years hopefully come back stronger," Brinkman said.

"Knowing us now, though, with 33 girls, we're not going to have a single injury just because we have a huge roster and I can see us not having a single injury because of it."

With such a large class that is loaded with talent, according to Neal, it's tough to pinpoint a few players that will shine.

"There's a handful that have stood out," Neal said. "So far, fitness levels have been off the charts, and they're also good players. Kelly Siewers from Richmond has been great. Kara DeGuisto from Virginia has been excellent. Alissa Pantuosco, [a junior] transfer from Clemson, has had a great couple of days. Alexis de Groot, phenomenal. All of them, though, have exceeded my initial expectations of what we thought we were getting."

Senior defender Jennifer McGorty echoed Neal, saying there is really a handful of players the Phoenix will see contribute in big proportions in 2013.

"I think you could say any of them," McGorty said. "It's a very, very strong class."

Neal projected many of the freshmen will see game action right away, including starts from many of them.

"They'll jump right in. You'll see a lot of minutes," he said. "You'll see a lot of substitutions this year. You'll see a lot more energy. We're capable of playing much more of an uptempo, pressing style of defense, which in turn will lead to the faster game."

Through two games, 10 newcomers have seen game action for the Phoenix with three of them getting starts. Of the three starters, freshmen Rachel Hallman and Erin Tanhauser have started both games.

Pantuosco has played in both games, including scoring the first goal of the season Aug. 23 against Coastal Carolina University on the way to a 2-0 victory.

Neal acknowledged the competition between freshmen for playing time, but Brinkman said the chemistry between the team keeps it from getting too cutthroat.

"It's fun competition," Brinkman said. "We're each other's best friends. We all get along. It's hard to hate each other when nobody is out to get anyone."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Moving on: Elon adjusts to life without Mellette

Matt Krause
Assistant Sports Editor

For the last four years, Elon University football has seen wide receiver Aaron Mellette break numerous school records while torching opposing Southern Conference defenses with ease.

The hype and attention surrounding Mellette grew as he made more and more exciting plays and put up spectacular numbers as his Elon career progressed. In April, the journey continued for Mellette as he was drafted in the seventh round of the National Football League draft by the Baltimore Ravens. On Aug. 31, Mellette became the first football player from Elon to make an NFL roster since 2007 graduate Chad Nkang.

While the Elon faithful continue to follow his pro career, his coaches are moving on, preparing to run an offense without Mellette on the field.

Head coach Jason Swepson and offensive coordinator Chris Pincince have taken the time of transition to strengthen the running game, which struggled mightily last season. Between then-sophomore Karl Bostick and then-freshman Tracey Coppedge, the Phoenix averaged a mere 85.1 rushing yards per game and 2.6 yards per rush.

“The reason why we relied on Aaron so much a year ago is just because we had young running backs,” Swepson said. “This year, our running backs are much older.”

Both Coppedge, a Southern Conference all-freshman team pick in 2012, and Bostick figure to play a big role for Elon, along with redshirt freshman B.J. Bennett. Bennett was injured for the duration of the 2012 season, but showed promise in spring practice and the spring game.

“We’ve got three kids that can really be top level kids at this level of football,” Pincince said. “They’re probably some of the better kids in the league.”

Despite a commitment to running the ball, Swepson is quick to point out Elon is still a pass-first team. Rather than utilizing one playmaker, the Phoenix wants to “spread the wealth” in the passing game in 2013.

“Without Aaron, we have a big opportunity to spread the ball around to our other playmakers at the receiver position,” said junior quarterback Mike Quinn.

Players such as redshirt freshman Justin Osborne, sophomore Andre Davis, junior Kierre Brown and senior Rasaun Rorie will be targets throughout the upcoming season. Rorie, who played opposite Mellette and hauled in 21 catches for 256 yards last year, will become the primary outside receiver, according to Swepson.

“He’s had a good camp,” Swepson said. “He’s showing some leadership skills and we’ve got to increase his catches.”

Davis, who impressed in the spring game, will move from the slot to an outside receiver position. Brown, who had what Swepson called “a breakout year” in

2012, looks to repeat and improve on his 45-catch, 642-yard season. According to Swepson, Osborne figures to play in the slot receiver position vacated by Davis’ move to the outside.

“If Kierre Brown can get up to 55 catches and Rasaun Rorie gets up to 40 catches, and Andre Davis gets to 40 catches and Justin Osborne gets to 30 catches, our production will not slip,” Swepson said.

Swepson and Pincince indicated sophomore Ricky Brown and junior Danny Sellers would also get playing time at receiver.

“Ricky Brown and Danny Sellers have a lot of experience for us,” Pincince said. “Especially two years ago, Danny Sellers played a lot of football for us.”

As Elon prepares for the upcoming season, the team acknowledges having

a new, inexperienced quarterback under center will be a challenge. The new signal caller will be surrounded by proven playmakers, though.

Quinn was quick to point to summer team workouts as a commitment to offensive improvement.

“Since most of the offense made a huge commitment to stay at Elon this summer, we really got a chance to play on each other’s strengths and help improve our weaknesses,” Quinn said. “This will help us in both the running and the passing game at all positions.”

While Elon will come to expect a more balanced offense committed to using the run to strengthen its high-octane passing game, the biggest difference will be Quinn doesn’t have a target like Mellette to throw to. For Elon football, 2013 is “A.M.” — After Mellette.





Sherrod overhauls Phoenix defense

Matt Krause
Assistant Sports Editor

Quite simply, the Elon University football team's defense struggled in 2012. Elon surrendered 350 points in 11 games a year ago for an average of 31.8 points per game — second to last in the Southern Conference.

The Phoenix ranked sixth of nine teams in the conference, allowing 386.5 yards per game. Another low point was defending the ground game — Elon ranked eighth by giving up 229.5 yards per game.

Former defensive coordinator Ed Pinkham accepted the same position with Western Michigan University in the offseason, leaving Elon with a coaching vacancy.

To fill the void, Brad Sherrod was hired from the University of Delaware. Sherrod, a former player at Duke University, was the linebackers coach for the previous three seasons at Delaware. In 2010, he had the opportunity to coach Delaware in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) National

Championship game, which ended in a loss to Eastern Washington University.

Sherrod's coaching journey also had stops at Western Carolina University, his alma mater Duke, the University of Massachusetts and East Tennessee State University.

"[This past offseason, Sherrod was] probably No. 4 or 5 on my list," said head coach Jason Swepson. "Within five minutes of our conversation, he jumped right to the top."

The Elon opening appealed to Sherrod because "it was an opportunity to be a defensive coordinator and to get back down in the South," Sherrod said.

Swepson's decision was influenced by a strong recommendation from former colleague Eric Ziady, the athletic director at Delaware.

"I know he wouldn't give me a false recommendation," Swepson said. "I talked to a lot of people that knew Coach Sherrod. During the whole interview process, I knew he was going to be a good fit here."

According to senior defensive lineman Tony Thompson, Sherrod has already made an impact on his players.

"Coach Sherrod brings passion, knowledge and enthusiasm to the game," Thompson said. "Every day he is out there coaching us, you can tell he truly loves being out there and is passionate about the game."

Elon's defense is experiencing a coaching style Sherrod described as "very demanding," with attention to "coaching the little things — making sure the little things don't come back to be bigger problems."

The Phoenix will utilize a base 4-3 defense this season with multiple coverages.

"It will allow us to be able to adjust to different [offensive] schemes that we see," Sherrod said. "We'll be very multiple in what we do but we'll be very simple."

"Coach Sherrod's defense is different in the sense that it allows us to be playmakers," Thompson said. "His defense is a great scheme but it doesn't inhibit our skills and it gives each player an opportunity to make plays."

A major defensive advantage for Elon this season is a veteran presence. The Phoenix is currently slated to start six seniors on defense, two of whom are designated captains.

Thompson, one of the captains, believes the Phoenix will rely on experience all season.

"We are a veteran group of guys that knows what it takes to be successful," Thompson said. "We are able to prepare more effectively than in the past. Almost everyone on the defense has game experience so we know what it's like in game situations, which allows us to understand where the defense needs to be and what it takes to be a successful unit."

Sherrod points to the natural leadership stemming from the experienced defense.

"We have a veteran team and it will help with the leadership on the field and off the field," Sherrod said. "They are leaders in the direction they want this football season to go. I'm very pleased with their attitude."

The feeling of satisfaction seems to be mutual, as the players have bought into Sherrod's leadership and guidance he brings to the program.

"It has been a pleasure being around someone who has a great knowledge of the game," Thompson said. "Coach Sherrod is constantly finding ways to improve us as a defense and as young men."

Football uses offseason for strength, chemistry

Matt Krause
Assistant Sports Editor

The word “chemistry” might take one’s mind back to a high school science lab. For the Elon University football team, chemistry refers to getting all 11 players on both sides of the ball to play as one.

Following the team’s spring game, the Phoenix discussed how important the summer would be for team bonding and building strength through workouts. Now, with summer having come and gone, both players and coaches alike are already seeing the benefits of their hard work.

For head coach Jason Swepson, the journey began in the winter with former strength and conditioning coach Eric Cash.

“We finally had a winter conditioning program that was above par,” Swepson said. “This past winter was critical for this football program.”

Cash left the program in the spring and was replaced by Ted Perlak, who came to Elon from Fordham University.

“Perlak came in mid-May and hit the ground running,” Swepson said. “The kids bought in and he sold his summer program to them.”

At least 50 players at a time were on campus

at a time this summer if said. The logistics of keeping so many players at school for the summer provided a small hurdle, but it was easily overcome.

“We had a lot of guys make a sacrifice [and] sleep on couches,” Swepson said. “We talked to the parents to help their sons out and stay here in the summer.”

Senior defensive lineman Tony Thompson, one of the captains of the Phoenix in 2013, said Perlak’s program allowed the team to “develop chemistry in and out of the weight room.”

Coming off a disappointing 3-8 season, the goals were clear for the players during the off-season. Junior quarterback Mike Quinn identified personal strength as a weakness for the Phoenix last season, which was a major focus for the summer.

“We had more kids on campus this summer and I think that shows our commitment to this season,” Quinn said. “We have really made strides in becoming a stronger, faster team. This is going to help, especially in the second half of our games this year.”

Last season, the Phoenix was outscored 161-104 in the second halves of games. Elon did not post a single come-from-behind win. Without a playmaker such as former wide receiver Aaron Mellette, Elon knows overall team strength is a key to success in 2013.

The offseason experience has paid great dividends in the eyes of the coaching staff.

“It was invaluable,” said offensive coordinator Chris Pincince. “Every one of our members of our program — offense, defense, special teams guys — spent time here this summer.”

Swepson echoed the sentiments of his offensive coordinator.

“It really brought the team together,” he said. “They were able to handle adversity, work out in the heat and we grew as a team and the chemistry is at a high right now.”

Like Swepson and Pincince, defensive coordinator Brad Sherrod has seen the benefits of offseason work.

“What you do in the summer really determines what kind of fall you are going to have,” Sherrod said. “[The players] are here, they’re around each other, pushing each other and challenging each other. They’re committed to having a good season, so that was the first step.”

In the eyes of Quinn, the summer experience gives Elon vast potential for the 2013 season.

“We became closer as a team, spending time out in the hot summer sun, working for a common goal of a SoCon championship,” he said.

FILE PHOTO BY AL DRAGO



Men's Football Schedule

@ Georgia Tech
Aug. 31, 70-0 L

v. West Virginia Wesleyan
Sept. 7, 6 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ North Carolina A&T
Sept. 14, 6 p.m. — Greensboro, N.C.

v. Appalachian State*
Sept. 21, 6 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Coastal Carolina
Sept. 28, 1:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Furman*
Oct. 5, 1:30 p.m. — Greenville, N.C.

@ Wofford*
Oct. 12, 1:30 p.m. — Spartanburg, S.C.

v. Chattanooga*
Oct. 19, 1:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Western Carolina*
Oct. 26, 3:30 p.m. — Cullowhee, N.C.

v. The Citadel*
Nov. 9, 1:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Georgia Southern*
Nov. 15, 3 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

@ Samford*
Nov. 23, 3:30 p.m. — Birmingham, Ala.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

SUMMER GAMES WITH

Volleyball team gains experience, memories from trip abroad

Max Garland
Senior Reporter

Of all the ways in which the Elon University volleyball team stood out this summer, their height difference was easily the most noticeable.

The “walking red giants,” as members of the team called themselves, spent a week in Italy and Switzerland this summer and gained valuable experience from their four matches against regional club teams. Despite losing each match, the Phoenix played several close sets while adjusting to a new time zone and rubberized balls different than those used in America.

“The games definitely helped the team grow,” said sophomore setter Ana Nicksic. “Any sorts of reps help us all get better. By throwing in some variables such as waking up early, walking around in the hot sun, riding a bus and then finally playing allowed us to rally as a team to try and get the job done.”

The team arrived May 26 in Milan, then took a cable car ride over the Como Lake to Brunate, a popular tourist destination during the summer. Assistant coach Tina Readling had one word to describe her initial reactions in a new country.

“Spoiled,” she said. “That’s how it feels to leave the familiarity of America and to land in Milan, Italy, where the airport signs have messages in Italian and underneath that for-

eign language, a message in English.”

The next day, the team played its first match in Lugano, a city in Switzerland bordering Italy. During their stay, they visited Alprose Chocolat, a famous chocolate factory in Caslano-Lugano.

“You would have thought it was brain surgery for me,” said sophomore middle blocker Catherine Head. “There were so many different types of chocolate that it was hard to pick just one.”

In their first game, Elon went up against Meda’s club team. Meda plays in the B-1 division in Italy, which is the top level for non-professional players.

Along with most other nations, Italy doesn’t gain professional players through collegiate athletics. Instead, they have club

teams for each age group. Sports are often a profession for a player as soon as they become a teenager.

The team had minimal time to prepare for its first match but still played with good effort, according to head coach Mary Tendler.

After Lugano, the team visited San Marino for two days to play its second match of the trip and continue their new dining experience.

“I probably spent 90 percent of my time in Italy sipping on cappuccinos and munching on pasta, pizza and prosciutto,” said senior defensive specialist Maggie Reichard. “After eating in dining halls for the past four years, every bite of food I took tasted like glory. The food is light, fresh and simply delicious.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

AN ITALIAN FLAVOR

During their visit to San Marino, the Phoenix played Ozzano's club team. Ozzano has beaten every U.S. college team that has played them in the last three years. Giulia Grasso, Ozzano's middle blocker, said Elon was the best team she faced out of all of them.

"The Phoenix players were not happy about the way they played, but they're learning and adjusting," said Elon associate professor Glenn Scott, who traveled with the team throughout Italy. "This is way outside their routine — just as it should be on a journey like this."

On May 30, the Phoenix stopped in Bologna, then made their way to the Tuscany region of Italy. After their third match of the trip against Montesport's club team, the team visited Cinque Terre and Porto Venere.

"Porto Venere was the perfect place to

visit after walking around Florence for an entire day," Head said. "While in Florence, I was surrounded by churches, statues, restaurants, stores and lots of people. In Porto Venere, I was surrounded by salt water, a sea breeze and spectacular views of the Mediterranean Sea. Visiting there was like taking a breath of fresh air."

Against Montesport, the Phoenix fell 3-1 after struggling with ball control in the first set. They found a better tempo in the third set and tested Montesport in the club's first official match.

The team returned to Milan to play its fourth and final match after a few days in Cinque Terre. The matchup came against Regalati di Sorriso, a club team at the level just below the professional ranks in Milan.

On the final day of the trip, the Phoenix visited the ever-popular Leaning Tower of

Pisa.

"I think Pisa was probably my favorite day," Head said. "I never knew exactly what the Leaning Tower looked like because I had only seen it in pictures. To me, it seemed smaller than I expected, but considering what the tower has been through, and it is still standing, is awesome in itself."

The women's volleyball team toured eight cities in 10 days during their trip and completed their experiential learning requirement with the course Travel Writing in Italy. Scott led the class, which provided academic instruction and activity during their exploration of the country.

"Travel Writing in Italy taught us how

to publicize our feelings about the trip," said sophomore outside hitter Megan Gravley. "It's kind of cool to be able to look back at our blog and reminisce."

How close is the Phoenix to a SoCon title?

Max Garland
Senior Reporter

Losing the last game of the season is difficult for any team to handle. It's even tougher when you realize how close you were to winning it all.

The Elon University volleyball team fell to Furman 3-0 (25-19, 25-22, 25-15) in three tightly contested sets last November in the Southern Conference Volleyball quarterfinals. Just two days after that, Furman lost by a mere two points in the final set of the championship game.

"Sure, it was the last match of the season for us, but it's much more than that," said sophomore outside hitter Megan Gravley. "I think it gave us motivation for this season. This year, we want to end our season with a win."

Although most teams would be content just getting back into the tournament, the Phoenix knows what kind of talent it has heading into the 2013 season. Because of that, a championship is the goal.

"We are chasing rings," said sophomore setter Ana Nicksic. "Winning the SoCon tournament would be so awesome. After every team meeting, practice or event I feel like we are getting one step closer."

Gravley and Nicksic were part of a talented yet inexperienced core for the Phoenix in 2012, but both earned spots on the SoCon all-freshman team. Gravley placed 10th in the conference in kills while Nicksic placed seventh in assists. With a year of playing time under their belts, they could be even better in 2013.

"Everybody returning got valuable game experience during the 2012 season," said assistant coach Jennifer Fry. "Along with that experience, our returners are also bringing strong leadership."

Leadership will be especially necessary to help out the impressive freshman class arriving this fall. Sydel Curry, Morgan Maner, Ally Karle and Kayla Agae have been winners all throughout their high school careers. The

coaching staff knew they would make an impact, but they didn't expect that impact to show itself so quickly.



FILE PHOTO BY MOLLY CAREY



FILE PHOTO BY AL DRAGO

"All four of our freshmen are doing very well," Fry said. "They came in in great shape, have been working hard and are learning both our defensive and offensive systems. We look forward to their progress."

This newfound depth — along with an imposing defense that led the SoCon in blocks — gives the Phoenix a perfect opportunity to get back into the tournament. How far they go depends on how they fare against the traditional powers of SoCon volleyball — Georgia Southern, Samford and Furman.

For most teams, games against the best in the conference are viewed with the utmost importance. Those are the games circled on the calendar. Elon takes a different approach.

"The most important game on the schedule is the next one," Fry said. "No game is more important than another. We diligently prepare for every team since

losing to a top ranked team affects us the same as losing to a lower ranked team."

Elon, Chattanooga and UNCG were separated by a total of two conference wins last year, which affected their seeding in the tournament. One losing streak could mean the end of the season considering how competitive the conference can be. The Phoenix is fully aware of this. With the stakes so high for each game this season, Elon's preseason scrimmages have had a tournament atmosphere.

"Preseason is a physical challenge but it is just as much of a mental challenge," Gravley said. "No matter how many times you go through it — whether it's your first preseason or your fourth preseason — you never get used to it. This year, our practices are centered around that goal of a championship and it motivates us to work hard in scrimmages and drills. Our coaches challenge us to work hard and have that competitive attitude at all

times."

The word "championship," as sacred as it is in the realm of sports, is something the players seem comfortable mentioning in conversation. Preseason aspirations aside, the true test of championship mettle will come in October, when the Phoenix faces the toughest stretch of their conference schedule. Two home games against Georgia Southern (Oct. 12) and Furman (Oct. 25) will be measuring sticks to see how much the team has grown.

"With the talent that this team has, they have the ability to push one another at each position in every practice," Fry said. "The thing the team must do this season to be successful is to continue to push each other at a high level."

The Elon volleyball team will play its final match as a member of the Southern Conference in 2013. Whether that match ends in a win or a loss remains to be seen.

NEXT IN LINE

Sydel Curry has game to back family name

Max Garland
Senior Reporter

It shouldn't surprise anyone that there is yet another sports phenom in the Curry family. Dell and Stephen are notorious 3-point shooters in NBA lore — the former historically, the latter currently. Seth played basketball at Duke University for the legendary Mike Krzyzewski. Sonya was a volleyball star at Virginia Tech. This time, it's Sydel, the freshman setter who has found a new home with the Elon University volleyball team.

"When I came on my visit to Elon, I immediately fell in love with it," Curry said. "I loved the campus, the atmosphere and the team. It just seemed like a perfect fit for me."

Curry is from Charlotte, where she was a three-year captain and two-time North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association (NCISAA) All-State selection at Charlotte Christian High School. She made an immediate impact, helping the team to three state quarterfinal appearances as well as a school record for wins in 2012.

"As a volleyball player, I would say I add a sense of calmness to the court but also a sense of competitiveness because I love to win," Curry said. "I work really hard to be the best I can be and to also allow my teammates to excel, as well. Being a setter, that's a huge part of what I do and that's what I love to do."

Curry is attached to volleyball thanks to her natural ability, passion for the game and parental influence, just like brothers Seth and Stephen are to basketball.

"I started playing volleyball about eight years ago and just fell in love with it," Curry said. "I thought that it would be cool to continue with a sport that my mom played in college at Virginia Tech since my brothers were going the basketball route."

Despite going their separate directions, Curry said she keeps up with her brothers through texting, calling or Skyping. But, growing up with them remains her fondest memory.

"Growing up in my family was really fun," Curry said. "Being the only girl, people often think that I would be left out, but I never felt that way. I loved it. I got to be one of the boys

with my brothers and be one of the girls when I was with my mom or other friends. There was never any real competition with me between my brothers. Of course it was fun and healthy competition between the two of them, though."

Seth and Stephen's friendly rivalry helped them make an impact in college at Liberty/Duke and Davidson, respectively. Dell and Sonya made sure they went to as many of their sons' games as possible, but as any parent with a house of athletes will attest, traveling is half the battle.

"When both of my brothers were in college, there would be times when my parents would have to split up and watch them," Curry said. "Volleyball isn't in the same season as bas-

ketball, so they were always at my games. It's definitely safe to say that my parents are professional travelers and road warriors. They are so incredibly supportive of us and have invested so much time and money in what we love to do. It's a great feeling when we are able to succeed and a lot of the thanks go to them."

Just like she did in high school, Curry is looking to help the Phoenix win right away. If sibling success is any indication, she will be just fine. Seth broke the Big South Conference single-season scoring record for a freshman. Stephen is a former Southern Conference Freshman of the Year. Curry isn't living off of her family's legacy — she is strengthening it.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Volleyball Schedule

UCF Classic @ UCF

Sept. 6, 1 p.m. — Orlando, FL

UCF Classic v. Stephen F. Austin

Sept. 6, 6 p.m. — Orlando, FL

UCF Classic v. George Washington

Sept. 7, 3:30 p.m. — Orlando, FL

@ High Point

Sept. 10, 7 p.m. — High Point, N.C.

Elon Phoenix Classic v. Gardner-Webb

Sept. 13, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

Elon Phoenix Classic v. North Carolina Central

Sept. 14, 12:30 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

Elon Phoenix Classic v. East Carolina

Sept. 14, 6 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Radford

Sept. 18, 6 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

49er Invitational v. Tennessee State University

Sept 20, 4:30 p.m. — Charlotte, N.C. ^

49er Invitational v. South Carolina State

Sept. 21. 10 a.m. — Charlotte. N.C.

49er Invitational @Charlotte

Sept. 21, 7 p.m. — Charlotte N.C.

@Georgia Southern*

Sept. 27, 6 p.m. — Statesboro, GA

@The Citadel*

Sept. 28, 2. p.m. — Charleston, S.C.

@UNCG*

Oct. 2, 7 p.m. Greensboro, N.C.

@ Davidson*

Oct. 4, 7 p.m. — Davidson, N.C.

@ North Carolina A&T

Oct. 8. 7 p.m. — Greensboro N.C.

v. The Citadel*

Oct. 11, 7 p.m. — Elon, N.C.

v. Georgia Southern*

Oct. 12. 4 p.m. — Elon. N.C.

@ Samford*

Oct. 18, 8 p.m. — Birmingham, AL

Vargas goes for another record-breaking season at Elon

Jordan Spritzer
Senior Reporter

With many students hailing from New England and the mid-Atlantic, some might feel Elon University is not a true North Carolina school. At times, finding someone from North Carolina, or the South in general, can be a bit of a challenge.

But the Phoenix does provide North Carolina flair in forms other than salmon shorts and Sperrys. Junior cross country runner Luis Vargas brings talented, true North Carolina blood to the Elon community.

Hailing from Angier, N.C., Vargas proved to be the well-rounded student athlete for which Elon traditionally looks. Vargas received honors during his four years at Harnett Central High School. Along with his academic accolades, Vargas was honored for his success in cross country by being named team MVP four times and receiving all-conference selection four times. He proved he was one of the top runners in the Tar Heel State by placing third overall in the cross country state meet in 2010 as a senior.

In 2011, Vargas continued his remarkable success into his freshman year at Elon.

"I only have four years at Elon," Vargas said. "I want to make the most out of all of them."

Following his largely successful freshman year, Vargas was named to the Southern Conference All-Freshman Team and All-Conference Second Team.

"He had an extraordinary year in 2011," said head coach Christine Engel.

Engel and the rest of the Phoenix watched Vargas continue his success into his sophomore year last season — one in which he broke two school records.

First, Vargas set the school record in the 8K at the Royal Cross Country Challenge Oct. 12 with a time of 24:16. Then, Vargas broke the 10K record at the Southeast Regional Championships Nov. 9, posting a time of 31:35.37.

Perhaps Vargas' most impressive feat in 2012 was being named First Team All-Southern Conference with a sixth overall finish in the Conference Championship

meet Oct. 27. There, he became the first male cross country runner in school history to be named to the First Team.

As Vargas and Engel pointed out, the drive to continue improving remains.

"Since he is a year older, he can handle a little bit more volume in training," Engel said. "And having two years of racing experience under his belt, he will be able to run with a little bit more confidence, which will help him in certain situations in all different races."

The increased intensity will be partnered with strong attention to detail. Vargas plans to focus on what he calls "the little things."

"Doing second runs, eating healthier, getting to bed earlier," he said. "Just doing the little things that add up over time."

But Vargas' continued desire for success is not sparked by any outside forces.

Despite setting high expectations for himself with his impressive freshman and sophomore seasons, Vargas said there is no added pressure on him this season.

"Every year there's pressure," he said. "But in the long run, I look to do the little things so I can meet the standard I have for myself."

Before Vargas and the rest of the Phoenix began their 2013 campaign Aug. 30 in the Wake Forest Relays at Wake Forest University — one in which the men's team finished second overall behind the host Demon Deacons and saw Vargas and partner, senior Ben Perron, take first overall in the men's race with a time of 36:00 even — the squad participated in a complete preseason workout, including the chance to escape campus and focus solely on running.

In a program that began Aug. 18, the men's team left for a brief yet intense training camp.

"It's different when you're running by yourself compared to when you're back at school," Vargas said.

Training camp allowed Vargas to prepare himself for his highly anticipated junior season. The back-to-back team MVP was free of all distractions and hype surrounding him. Yet at the end of the day, Vargas loves cross country.

"Every second counts in our sport, and that's the beauty of it," he said.

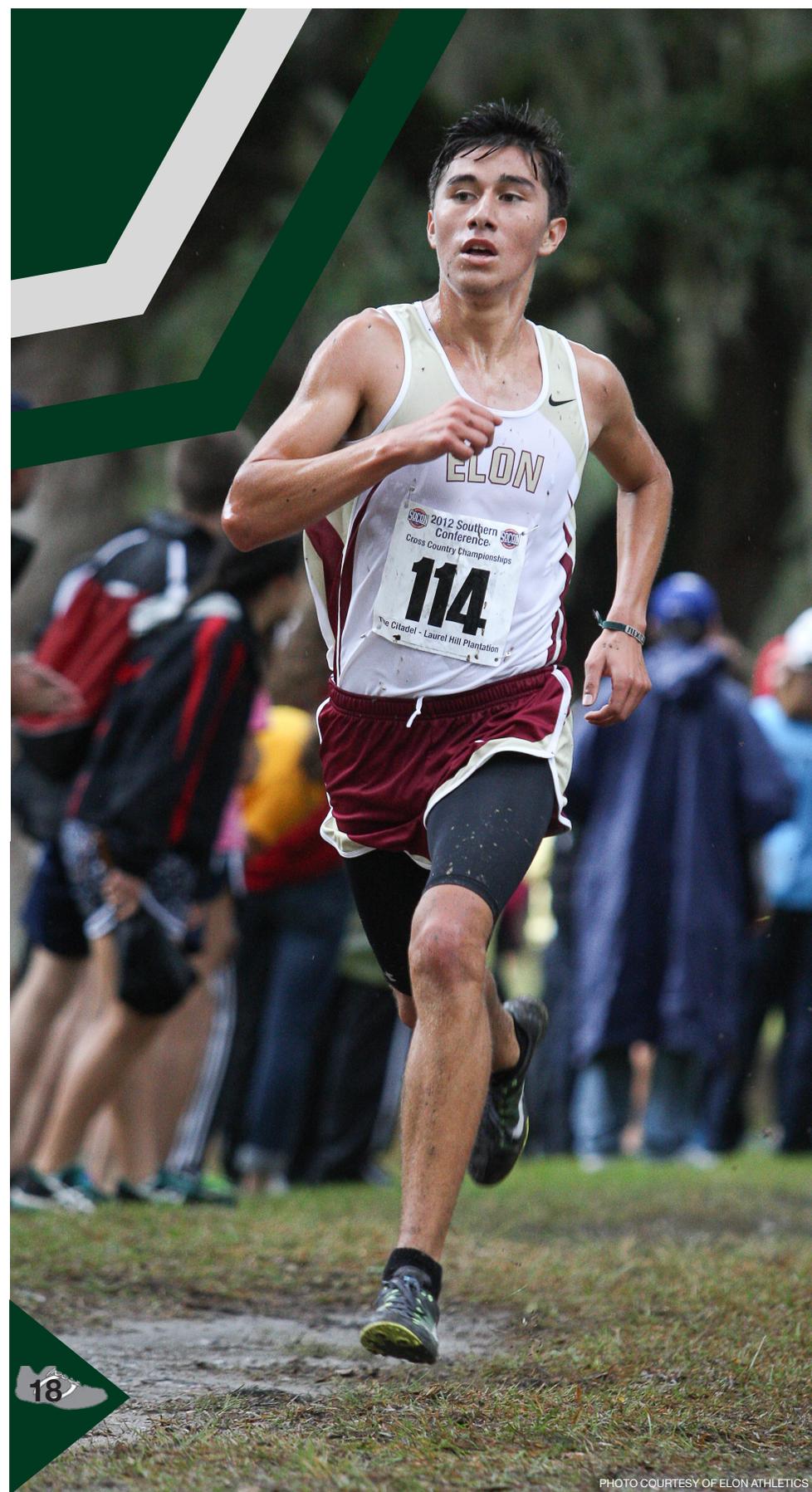


PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Bierut looks to guide Phoenix deeper into championship season

Jordan Spritzer
Senior Reporter

For decades, conventional wisdom suggested college was a time for young men and women to mature. It was an opportunity to get their feet wet in the real world and the ability to go out on their own. But according to head cross country coach Christine Engel, it was sophomore Elyse Bierut's maturity that brought her to Elon.

"Her maturity was one of the reasons I recruited her," she said. "I saw that from our first meeting in her junior year of high school. Her workout routine and discipline was evident. I knew there was something special about her back then."

Once Bierut got on campus, she continued to grow.

"She brought that maturity to another level once she stepped foot at Elon," Engel said.

Bierut herself did not acknowledge much about her discipline other than having goals and looking to achieve them any way possible.

"The goal is always to get better and to improve," Bierut said. "I've been working really [hard] with my coaches, focusing on the little things to do what I need to do at practice on a daily basis."

In her first competitive collegiate race, Bierut and then-junior Allyson Oram won the combined 5,000 meter event to place first overall at the Demon Deacon Quad and help the women's team to a first-place finish in the 2012 season's first event. The pair combined for an impressive time of 37:28.

Bierut also put herself in the Elon record book by running the second fastest 6K at the NCAA Pre-Nationals and the third-fastest 6K two weeks later at the Southern Conference Championships. Her eighth-place finish overall earned Bierut a spot on the Second Team all-Conference.

Despite Bierut's success, her thrill was short-lived as the Phoenix lost out on the overall conference championship by just four points. Now, Bierut and the rest of the Phoenix are looking for a shot at redemption.

"Missing out on the conference championship has made us hungry to come back stronger and finish stronger this year," Bierut said.

Engel knows how much it stung the team to lose by such a close margin, but she said it will also help them get back in the chase

in 2013.

"Any time you come that close to a championship, you want to be back in the hunt again," Engel said.

For Bierut, she returns to a familiar environment as she comes back for her second season with the team.

"It's nice to come back in as a sophomore having that experience of my first collegiate season under my belt," she said.

Thanks to her teammates, Bierut said she will not be getting too comfortable this season.

"Complacency is not an issue," Bierut said. "It's easy to stay motivated. We have a highly motivated group of girls and coach [Engel] is very motivated. We say, 'Every day is another day to get better,' and we go in

with that mindset every day."

Engel acknowledged it will be a highly contested race to determine the conference champions. But she feels the team is already showing signs of what it takes to come out on top.

"It's going to be extremely competitive with Furman, App State and UNCG looking strong," Engel said. "But the girls have really done their homework over the summer and have come back very fit."

Even after an impressive start to her Phoenix cross country career and an extremely difficult conference competition on the horizon, nerves are not getting to Bierut. She admits worrying is not a problem for her.

"Coach Engel does the worrying, so I don't have to," she said.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS



Cross Country Schedule

Demon Deacon Quad
Aug. 30, All day — Winston-Salem, N.C.

Elon Invitational
Sept. 14, 9 a.m. — Elon, N.C.

Charlotte Invitational
Sept. 14, TBD — Charlotte, N.C.

Blue Ridge Open
Oct. 17, TBD — Boone, N.C.

NCAA Pre-National
Oct. 19, TBD — Terra Haute, Ind.

**Southern Conference
Championships**
Nov. 2, TBD — Birmingham, Ala.

NC State Three Stripe Invitational
Nov. 9, TBD — Raleigh, N.C.

**NCAA Southeast Regional
Championships**
Nov. 15, TBD — Charlottesville, Va.

HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

FILE PHOTO BY GLORIA SO



Cross country looks ahead to all-important Elon Invitational

Jordan Spritzer
Senior Reporter

Athletes and teams alike are always looking for some sort of advantage, something that will give them a much-needed edge and help push them to victory. Competition is so extreme that any slight advantage, perceived or real, is welcome.

Several Elon University athletic teams thrive with home field advantage. Both men's and women's basketball teams finished with winning records behind extremely good form and loud, rowdy crowds while at home. Elon baseball's success has been aided by good home records in recent years at Latham Park.

But one sport rarely reaps the benefits of home field advantage, even though it enjoys that luxury.

"The Elon Invitational is the only home event we have all season for cross country or track," said Elon head coach Christine Engel. "It's definitely nice for the runners to wake up in their own beds, walk across campus and get ready to race."

The lone opportunity for Elon cross country to show off its talent at home comes at the fifth annual Elon Invitational Sept. 14. The runners are equally as excited about trying to make the most of their sole home event.

"It's always nice to represent your school, especially to do better on your home turf," said junior Luis Vargas. "The Elon Invitational gives us more motivation to do better and be better."

Vargas narrowly missed out on winning the men's race in 2012, but his second place finish propelled the Phoenix to their second overall win in the Elon Invitational.

In particular, the women's team will be looking forward to the 2013 installment of the Elon Invitational, having won the race for two straight years.

"We like to race on our home course and to host other teams," said sophomore Elyse Bierut, who finished the 2012 race fourth overall. "We practice on our course all season, but it's nice to actually race on the course with competition there."

With both the men's and women's teams experiencing home field advantage at the Elon Invitational, the interest and size of the event has grown in recent years.

"It's a fun event for the community and more people on campus have started to become

more interested," Bierut said.

Both teams are looking to have a strong showing in the home event despite it being only the team's second event on the season.

"It'll be early in the season, but it's important because it's the women's first 5K and the men's first 8K," Engel said. "So it'll be the first opportunity to race the distance run at the Conference Championships."

Engel also realizes it's still a feeling-out process for many of the runners.

"For a lot of the runners, it's getting their feet wet for the first time this season and hoping to build on that," she said.

The race also acts as a way for both teams to get an early season look at their competition for the conference championship.

Local rivals University of North Carolina at Greensboro will once again compete in the Elon Invitational, and Engel said she believes UNCG will be the toughest competition in both the Invitational and the conference.

"They'll definitely be in the hunt for a championship," Engel said. "It'll be very exciting getting to race against a conference team this early in the season."

As exciting as the prospect of matching up against a talented rival is, it is important for the teams to keep the emphasis on themselves and not try to do too much, Vargas said.

"We try not to think about other teams because every team is different — the way they train is different," he said. "We definitely look at past races from prior years and see the times from each team and we learn from them, but we don't let that get too much in our heads. It doesn't distract us. It just motivates us to get that extra second that separates first and second."

But it is worth noting UNCG runners won both the men's and women's races in 2012, despite losing to Elon in the overall competition on both sides. As a junior with the Spartans, Chelsea Sumney won the women's race with a time of 17:44. Then-freshman Abraham Kemboi won the men's race by eight seconds over Vargas with a time of 25:29.

With only North Carolina A&T State University and UNCG confirmed to compete, the competition looks to be filled with local talent. In past years, other North Carolina schools such as Raleigh's William Peace College, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Belmont Abbey College and Barton College have competed.

The Elon Invitational women's race is scheduled for 9 a.m. Sept. 14, immediately followed by the men's race at 9:40 a.m., starting and ending on South Campus' intramural fields.