



FALL SPORTS EDITION

ELON
PHOENIX

2026 Fall Sports

SPORT GO

STORY TYPE GO



Page 4 / Football Preview / Fall 2026

4 Football

Phoenix football looks to accountability to take next step in 2026

► Read story



Page 5 / Women's Soccer Player Feature / Fall 2026

5 Women's Soccer

Elon's dynamic defender enters senior season with women's soccer

► Read story



Page 6 / Men's Soccer Preview / Fall 2026

6 Men's Soccer

Elon men's soccer eyes return to glory

► Read story



Page 6 / Volleyball Senior Spotlight / Fall 2026

6 Volleyball

Volleyball seniors reflect on their time at Elon

► Read story



Page 7 / Cross Country Season Outlook / Fall 2026

7 Cross Country

Defending champions look to keep Elon women's cross country on top

► Read story

THE PENDULUM
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CORRECTIONS

In Photos of the Week in the Sept. 2 edition of The Pendulum, two photo credits were incorrectly noted. The bottom left photo was taken by Ethan Wu and the bottom right photo was taken by Alexander Siegel.

2026 FALL SPORTS HOME SCHEDULE

Football

Sept. 19 | Sacred Heart | Rhodes Stadium | 6 p.m.

Sept. 29 | Maine | Rhodes Stadium | 2 p.m.

*Family Weekend

Oct. 10 | Wofford | Rhodes Stadium | 2 p.m.

*Homecoming

Nov. 7 | Hampton | Rhodes Stadium | 2 p.m.

Nov. 14 | Campbell | Rhodes Stadium | 2 p.m.

Women's Soccer

Sept. 13 | Charleston Southern | Rudd Field | 1 p.m.

Sept. 20 | Campbell | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Sept. 24 | Stony Brook | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Sept. 27 | Hofstra | Rudd Field | 1 p.m.

Oct. 18 | William & Mary | Rudd Field | 1 p.m.

Oct. 25 | Hampton | Rudd Field | 1 p.m.

Men's Soccer

Sept. 15 | Radford | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Sept. 19 | College of Charleston | Rudd Field | 12 p.m.

Sept. 29 | USC Upstate | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Oct. 6 | Guilford College | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Oct. 13 | Longwood | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Oct. 17 | UNCW | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Oct. 24 | Wake Forest | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Oct. 31 | Campbell | Rudd Field | 7 p.m.

Volleyball

Sept. 11 | Davidson | Schar Center | 6 p.m.

Sept. 12 | USC Upstate | Schar Center | 6 p.m.

Sept. 19/20 | College of Charleston | Schar Center | 8 p.m./3 p.m.

Oct. 2/3 | Stony Brook | Schar Center | 6 p.m./2 p.m.

Oct. 16/17 | William & Mary | Schar Center | 6 p.m./2 p.m.

Oct. 30/31 | Campbell | Schar Center | 6 p.m./3 p.m.

Nov. 10 | Gardner-Webb | Schar Center | 6 p.m.

Players to watch



Brady Stober
Football

Sophomore quarterback

9,000 passing yards, 106 total touchdowns in High School
Nine touchdowns in five starts at Samford University

“When he got here in January, he was all business,” head coach Tony Trisciani said. “He couldn’t meet with our offensive staff enough. It’s hard to believe that this is only his second year of college football. Just his composure, his poise. His command.”



Luke Chisum
Men’s
Cross Country

Sophomore runner

Placed 46th in CAA Championships freshman year
11th place at U.S. 2026 U20 3000m steeplechase

“Running the U20 championships in the Steeplechase was a massive, massive accomplishment for him and our team,” head coach Mark Rinker said. “Luke had a fantastic summer after U20s, and he’s really motivated.”



Jahmir Flowers
Men’s Soccer

Senior midfielder

6 career goals for Phoenix
2 career assists
1632 minutes played for Elon

“He’s got electric, dynamic 1-v-1 pace,” head coach Marc Reeves said. “Jahmir has started the season very consistently, and I like the way he’s looking. I think that can happen sometimes in your senior year. You become a little bit more relaxed, and you start playing better.”



Isa Murdock
Women’s
Soccer

Redshirt senior forward

20 career goals
12 career assists
Hat-trick against VMI this season
4,451 minutes played

“We talk a lot about runners in the box, especially when Isa has the ball,” teammate Gabby Tirado said. “She’s the type of player that’s going to dribble, take people on.”

Phoenix football looks to accountability to take next step in 2026

Phoenix relying on player-led leadership, young talent, attention to detail

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

During a two-hour practice, Elon football head coach Tony Trisciani made sure his players knew that being off the field does not mean being out of the game.

“Mental reps! When you’re off, you still should be doing mental reps,” yelled Trisciani, a familiar echo after the team’s first game.

For Trisciani, the instruction is about more than simply knowing where to line up. It’s part of a larger emphasis that has defined Elon’s offseason and carried into the 2026 season.

Accountability.

After two consecutive 6-6 seasons, a 4-4 conference record last season and ranking of third in the Coastal Athletic Association preseason poll, Elon enters 2026 with a clear goal: improve and win the conference. But to do so, Trisciani believes the Phoenix need to develop the habits that have eluded them in the moments that mattered most.

“We’ve lost some football games where it came down to little details,” Trisciani said. “Was it a pre-snap penalty? Was it an undisciplined decision? Poor judgment after the whistle? Was it a selfish decision that impacts the whole team?”

Those details have become a point of emphasis throughout the program.

Lessons in leadership

Co-captain and graduate receiver, William Lankford, said discipline has been one of the biggest differences he’s noticed compared with previous Elon teams. Even seemingly minor details, like keeping shirts tucked in or making sure the correct foot is on the line during sprints, have been emphasized throughout the offseason.

The goal, Lankford said, is to eliminate mistakes in practice before they become mistakes on Saturdays. That emphasis isn’t limited to the coaching staff.

Trisciani said Elon has intentionally made accountability a player-led responsibility, with older players expected to hold teammates to the program’s standards.

Among those leaders are Lankford and his fellow captains, graduate Tim Hogan, graduate Jevan Brown and redshirt junior Brodie Carroll, alongside senior Jimmyll Williams, redshirt junior Dylan Magazu and others.

The program has also spent the offseason intentionally developing those leaders.

Elon’s players were divided into smaller teams of 12, led by some of the program’s top veterans. Those groups competed throughout the offseason, accumulating points and earning rewards such as new sneakers.

The program also brought in Chris Leupold, an Elon leadership professor, to work with the players and staff on developing leadership skills.

The purpose was simple: create a team where accountability doesn’t stop when the coaches leave the room.

“It’s player-led,” Trisciani said. “There’s certainly accountability from the top with coaches, but player-led leadership and accountability is important.”

That work extended to team bonding during summer workouts. Trisciani purposefully put players who normally wouldn’t cross paths — like a freshman defensive back with a senior offensive lineman — together to encourage connection across the team.

Brodie Carroll, the team’s star linebacker, thinks that will make a difference.

“That’s been huge, just to build that bond,” Carroll said. “I feel like you need to have that bond off the field.”

That leadership will be especially important for a team that blends veteran experience with an influx of younger contributors.

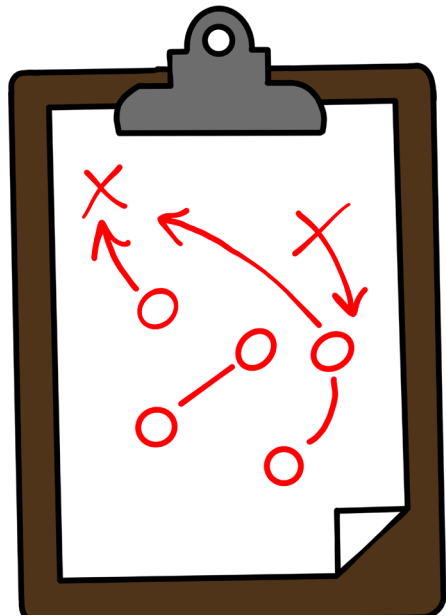


ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon graduate defensive end Dillion Pardue and sophomore defensive tackle Chaz Knox face off at the line of scrimmage against Glenville State University in their 42-7 win Aug. 27 at Rhodes Stadium.

Under new NCAA rules adopted in June, Division I athletes were granted a five-year window to play college sports, adding an extra year to every player’s eligibility. That’s allowed Elon to lean into its recruiting philosophy.

Trisciani said the Phoenix remain heavily reliant on high school recruiting, meaning the roster is “bottom-heavy” in terms of age. Instead of worrying about preserving a redshirt season, Elon can now play younger players when they are ready to contribute.



DESIGN BY AMELIA METZ

Elon opened the season with a 42-7 win, holding Glenville State University to just 125 total yards. Among the young players who saw meaningful action was offensive lineman Will Tellers, who started his first college game as a true freshman — something Trisciani called rare at the position. Trisciani said his intelligence and reflexes helped him get on the field, but he wants Tellers to get stronger.

New faces, new defensive opportunities

On defense, young players such as second-year linebackers Derek Hite and Ryder Duffy are playing alongside Carroll, while freshmen Xavier Porter, Tyler Dent and Tyler Owens are working their way into the secondary rotation.

Trisciani called Carroll the “quarterback of the defense,” pointing to his football IQ and preparation. Carroll, an All-CAA second-team selection last season, recorded 103 tackles in 2025.

“He’s always studying the game,” Trisciani said, boasting about his linebacker. “He’s going to be prepared and a step ahead.”

That experience will be valuable for a defense that lost several contributors from last season’s defensive line, which Carroll credited for a large amount of his success.

Elon finished 2025 with 39 sacks, the most in the CAA. But several of the players responsible for that production are no longer on the roster, including K a h m a r i Brown, who transferred after breaking the program’s single-season record with 12 sacks.

Still, Trisciani believes the group has enough depth to compensate.

Sophomores Chaz Knox, Rylan Shibley and Rashad Reid form a young interior group that Trisciani described as disruptive, while graduates Dillon Pardue, Trey Woods and redshirt junior Nhyer Kelly provide experience on the edge.

The secondary, meanwhile, is undergoing more turnover. The younger defensive backs will be led by captain Jevan Brown, who Trisciani said has brought maturity and a strong football IQ to the group. That can be seen at practice, where Brown is constantly guiding his teammates, on and off the field.

Changes on offense

Offensively, Elon will also look different.

Brady Stober enters his second year of college football and his first season as Elon’s starting quarterback after transferring from Samford. Elon had recruited Stober since high school, and the Phoenix were his first official college offer.

Now, Trisciani said Stober’s maturity, composure and command have stood out since he arrived in January. Lankford said he was impressed by Stober’s immediate impact on the team.

“He’s a great guy, and he’s just come in and been a leader as soon as he came here,” Lankford said. “I just know he’s going to be successful, and I’m super excited to see that.”

Stober’s first game offered an early glimpse of what Elon hopes he can provide. The sophomore completed 16-of-26 passes for 245 yards and three touchdowns in the

season-opening win, including a fade-route touchdown to redshirt freshman Benjamin Kirsch.

Stober injured his wrist in Elon’s second game of the season against Davidson College. Elon Athletics has not confirmed the severity of the injury. Backup quarterbacks TJ Crews IV and Tanner Payne took control of the rest of the game, leading Elon to a 38-0 victory.

Trisciani said he remains confident in the team, regardless of who’s at quarterback.

“It’s a football team, so if Brady can’t go, then next man up,” Trisciani said. “You saw two quarterbacks

that can play winning football out there today.”

Elon has a deep receiver room to catch passes from those quarterbacks — touting a trio of veterans and a variety of young options. Trisciani was quick to point out that Elon’s pass catchers go beyond the receiver room, including three running backs with different styles.

Jimmyll Williams provides a physical, downhill presence, freshman Kameron McDowell-Moore brings speed and explosiveness, and redshirt senior Dan Fredrick provides a combination of strength and length.

That versatility fits what Trisciani describes as an “equal opportunity offense.”

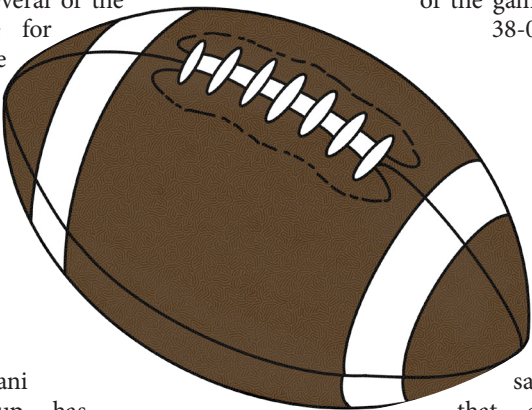
“If you get open, create separation, you can get the football,” Trisciani said when asked his plan to keep everybody involved in the offensive game plan.

And while the offense and defense may receive most of the attention, Trisciani said special teams remain a critical piece of the team’s identity. Field position and hidden yardage, he said, can determine the outcome of games — particularly for a team trying to turn close losses into wins.

For Trisciani, those margins provide a clear target for a team that has spent the offseason focused on eliminating small mistakes. Ultimately, however, the pieces only matter if Elon can put them together.

Trisciani’s goals haven’t changed: win a CAA championship, return to the playoffs and advance once there.

“We’ve been close, knocking on the door,” Trisciani said. “We need to knock it down.”



DESIGN BY AMELIA METZ

Elon's dynamic defender enters senior season with women's soccer

Grace Gelhaus dominates both sides of the ball

Abigail Hines
Managing Editor of elonnewsnetwork.com

When Grace Gelhaus pushes downfield from her defensive position, it's not about what she sees in front of her, but the people she knows are behind her.

The senior finished last season as the Coastal Athletic Association's 2025 Defender of the Year after racking up 1,293 minutes in Elon's backline, which conceded the fewest goals in the CAA, registering eight shutouts.

Gelhaus makes a strong showing on the offensive side as well. Gelhaus rounded out the 2025 season with seven goals and three assists, tied for most on the team.

She said support from her teammates makes balancing both sides of the ball easier.

"If I go forward, someone else will cover. If someone else goes forward, I can cover for them, and it's really just like in the flow of the game," Gelhaus said. "We obviously all have a lot of chemistry together, and I know that if I do get up, I can find someone will be making a run for me, and they'll make my life easy, and I know that I don't really have to worry about sprinting back because someone will cover for me."

This dynamic approach is not limited to just Gelhaus. She said the entire team has the chance to help one another from different parts of the field when needed, a skill that sets them apart from their opponents.

"The teams that we play against, defenders are defenders, and our team, everybody has the chance to attack if they want to, because we know that someone else will drop in and fill for them so that everybody gets their chance," Gelhaus said.

Gelhaus came to Elon in 2023 with 11 other freshmen — recruited as an offensive striker from the FC Stars girls club in New



Elon University senior defender Grace Gelhaus walks under the scoreboard at Rudd Field during their game against High Point University on Aug. 30.

England. Throughout her time as a Phoenix, she's moved from forward and midfield to defense, and her development as a player is seen on and off the field.

Gelhaus said she was finding her footing at the beginning of her college career, and building a connection with her teammates made that adjustment easier.

"It's like I have 26 best friends, and I know that they're also from all over the country," Gelhaus said. "I just know that I'm not alone, and other people are feeling homesick, and they're not getting to see their families as much. But I know that I always have a shoulder to lean on if I need one."

Though her position on the field may have changed, head coach Neil Payne said Gelhaus established her potential and drive early and has improved every year since.

"Grace has made a tremendous impact on our program from day one," Payne said in a statement to Elon News Network. "Her level of play continues to improve each year, a testament to the hard work and dedication she brings to development every day."

Gelhaus' dedication can also be seen in the trophy room. She was named to the All-CAA third team as a freshman before leaping to the first team the last two seasons. The hardware doesn't end there.

Elon women's soccer finished the 2025 season as CAA champions. Gelhaus played in every single minute of the tournament, never leaving the field. Looking forward to the rest of the season, she said the team doesn't want the conference title to distract from the work they have ahead of them.

"We kind of have to think of it as, it's a new year because we don't want to dwell on the past, and like we don't want to just keep living that," Gelhaus said. "We want to grow, and we want to keep getting better. That's the goal."

Gelhaus scored her first goal of the season during the 6-0 win against South Carolina State University on Aug. 20. This makes 14 goals total for her career.

The Phoenix will spend the rest of September on home turf, facing Charleston Southern University on Sept. 13 and then three CAA teams.

'Tough times don't last': Two-time football captain leads others to success

Elon's 'unc' wants to leave Elon football better than he found it

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

Graduate receiver William Lankford's nickname is fitting.

"You tell him, Unc," members of the Elon football team said as graduate receiver William Lankford prepared for an interview.

On Oct. 9, Lankford will reach 20 years around football. And as he enters his fifth and final season at Elon, he has found himself taking on a role that extends beyond what he does between the lines.

He's the guy younger players can lean on. "An Unc that takes care of his nephews," Lankford said when asked what type of leader he is.

Lankford was named a captain for the second consecutive season, but he said he's grown into the role. He's become more vocal, using his experience to make sure teammates are in the right place and aren't left in a pinch.

The message he gives his 'nephews' is simple: "Tough times don't last. Tough people do."

Lankford knows that lesson firsthand.

He began his Elon career as a quarterback, eventually making his first college start. It didn't go the way he hoped.

"I didn't necessarily perform to a winning standard," Lankford admitted. "And I actually performed pretty poorly."

The experience stuck with him. But instead of allowing the difficult moments to define him, Lankford leaned on his teammates — the same teammates who



Graduate receiver William Lankford battles freshman cornerback Tyler Dent on a go route to the boundary at an Elon football practice Sept. 1.

helped keep him going when he was struggling.

He said that this experience has shaped how he approaches leadership today. Football, he tells younger players, isn't something they have to navigate alone.

"You're never going to be able to play this sport by yourself," Lankford said. "That's kind of been one thing I've tried to nail into younger guys ever since I've been in this role."

His own career has given him plenty of perspectives to share.

After starting as a quarterback, Lankford has transitioned to receiver and special teams, allowing him to understand the game from multiple positions. He said his quarterback background helps him recognize coverages as a receiver, while his work on special teams has taught him to appreciate the players whose contributions

may not show up in the box score.

Now, as one of Elon's oldest players, his focus has shifted again.

When asked what would make this season successful, Lankford didn't start with statistics or personal accomplishments. He talked about his teammates.

He wants to see younger players succeed. He wants to see sixth-year receiver and close personal friend Jamarien Dalton return from a year of injury and thrive. He wants to see sophomore quarterback Brady Stober continue to grow as a leader — even though Lankford competed with him at quarterback earlier this summer. And he wants to watch the teammates he's spent years alongside reach their own goals.

"I just kind of want to see the younger guys on our team win," Lankford said.

For Lankford, that's what success looks like now.

"Seeing their successes and everything that they got going on, whether they stay here or don't, that I think that'll be success for me," Lankford said.

Head coach Tony Trisciani said Lankford has been one of the most vocal players to step up as the team looks to increase its focus on accountability.

"He's one of the guys who has really stepped up," Trisciani said. "It can't just be coaches. It has to be players too."

That player-led accountability has become a major emphasis for Elon entering the 2026 season, and Lankford is one of the veterans expected to establish that standard.

Trisciani said Lankford's approach embodies the philosophy Elon's players have with one another.

"It's a matter of like deposits and withdrawals with each other," Trisciani said, praising the captains' leadership. "If I'm going to hold somebody accountable, I need to be making deposits with them, right? Making sure they know that I know, and encouraging them when they do right. So when they do wrong, and I need to make a withdrawal, there have been enough deposits there."

After 20 years around football, Lankford's final season isn't simply about what he can accomplish. It's about what he can leave behind.

And if the Phoenix accomplish their goals, Lankford said he might measure his final season not by what his name says on the stat sheet, but by the names of the players he helped along the way.

And then, it's time to move on.

"I've got to start working," Lankford joked while walking to the locker room. "I've got to become a working man."

Elon men's soccer eyes return to glory

How culture became Phoenix's biggest weapon

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

Elon men's soccer head coach Marc Reeves doesn't spend much time looking backward.

Even after a season that ended with a Coastal Athletic Association regular-season title, a conference tournament championship and an NCAA Tournament appearance, the message inside the program has been simple: last year is last year.

"We don't even talk about last year in any format other than we know what it takes to get back there, and we know it's a game-by-game process," Reeves said.

That forward-looking mentality, paired with a roster that returns much of its core while adding key transfers, has Elon positioned for another run in 2026.

Defense built to last

Last season's Phoenix squad built its identity on the back of a stingy defense, finishing among the nation's best in goals-against average. Reeves isn't interested in reinventing that identity, even as the team looks to add more scoring punch.

"Every year your group can be slightly different, and the way we do it, we always want to play to the strengths of our players," Reeves said. "This year, we're probably slightly more technical than we've been in a while, hopefully more of a threat on offense, but we certainly don't want to go away from those pillars of our program."

That defensive identity comes with an intriguing battle in goal.

The Phoenix are replacing standout keeper Jackson Leavitt from last season with a competition between redshirt junior Drew Hartman and redshirt freshman Mikolaj Lenarcik.

Reeves split the first two games of the season evenly between the two, and the job remains up for grabs.

"Both of them are really good goalkeepers," Reeves said. "I feel completely confident with either of them as our starting goalkeeper, and neither of them have separated themselves enough to say, 'I'm the guy.' So training is designed to give them opportunities to do that."

In front of them, Elon returns several pieces from last year's defense while continuing to integrate new players.

Sophomore transfer Tønnes Daland has stepped into the left center-back role after transferring in during the spring, while



Elon University sophomore defender Magnus Jacobsen dribbles the ball during their match against Virginia Military Institute on Aug. 20 at Rudd Field.

veteran graduate students such as Ryan Manna and Carlos Levy provide experience behind the younger pieces.

The goal, Reeves said, is to preserve the defensive foundation that helped carry Elon last season while giving the team more freedom to attack.

More firepower up top

If the defense is the constant, the attack is where Reeves expects the biggest evolution.

The Phoenix return a deep and versatile front group, headlined by redshirt junior forward Dominik Renz, who won CAA Rookie of the Year last season.

"Dom's first year last year with our program was exceptional," Reeves said. "I don't think people understand how pivotal he is to the way we play. He holds the ball up well, he presses well, he's a threat behind — he's just a really team-first, committed forward who's also got real ability."

Renz isn't the only returning option.

Seniors Jordin Wilson and Jahmir Flowers, redshirt sophomore Oscar Tonidandel and

redshirt freshman Diego Thompson give Reeves a variety of options to rotate through as the season develops.

Elon also added transfers such as redshirt junior Ben Madore from Penn State University and redshirt freshman Mohamed Kallon from North Carolina State University, giving the Phoenix attacking options as they look to increase their offensive production.

Madore appeared in 31 matches for the Nittany Lions, scoring five goals last season.

Reeves set a collective target for that group. "If we can get to that 40-goals mark as a front four group, we're probably in good shape," Reeves said.

Senior captain Martin Kozak, who was named CAA Tournament Most Outstanding Player in 2025, has already contributed offensively. Reeves pointed to him as one of the players who can help lead the attack.

Continuity and new faces

Elon's 2026 roster blends returning pieces with newcomers who arrived via the transfer portal in the spring.

Rather than allowing those transfers to remain outsiders, Reeves said the players were integrated into the team immediately.

"We had four players transfer in the spring. I'll almost forget they're transfers because they played every minute in the spring and they've added so much," Reeves said.

Reeves credited graduate students Manna and Levy, along with Kozak, as key leaders in helping those players adjust.

That culture-first approach extends to how Elon evaluates potential additions.

"When there's really good players, and maybe there's some question marks on some things, you believe that your culture and your leadership, the guys that have been here, can assist them to be more on board," Reeves said. "But you can't go outside the extremes. We won't take anyone who's not ready academically. We won't take anyone who's got major red flags socially."

A family that plays like one

Ask Kozak, who transferred to Elon two years ago from St. John's University, to describe the team, and the answer comes without hesitation.

"I'll say a family," Kozak said. "It's just because of how united we are, how tight, how caring."

Kozak transferred to Elon in part because of a connection through his former coach at St. John's, who had once coached Reeves. But it was a visit to campus that sealed the decision.

"When I came here, I was just like, this place is it," Kozak said. "I'm a guy that usually I guide my life based on what I feel, what I sense, and when I came to Elon, I was like, 'Holy, this place is for me.'"

That family culture, Reeves said, starts with the coaching staff and its daily standard.

"We show up every day positive, we show up every day early, we show up every day prepared," Reeves said. "When you do that, it translates to the players."

Unfinished business

Elon's 2025 season ended in heartbreaking fashion — a penalty-kick loss to the University of North Carolina, Greensboro in the NCAA Tournament after the Phoenix won both the CAA regular-season and tournament titles.

Kozak said that the near-miss still lingers as motivation.

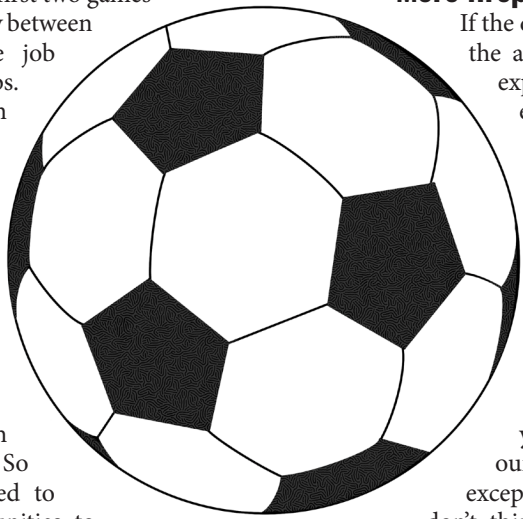
"It gave us a bitter taste. We wanted something else," Kozak said. "It's something that proves we are ready to compete at the highest level, we are ready to be an NCAA team, we are ready to win NCAA games. It's just a matter of correcting those little details and believing that we deserve to be up there."

Returning to the NCAA Tournament means playing through a competitive schedule, but Reeves is focused on the process that has made Elon a consistent CAA contender.

"We need to finish in the top three in the CAA South," Reeves said. "Our body of work can get us in as an at-large, too. But this program's goals will remain the same: we want to advance in the NCAA Tournament. We're not here to just make up the numbers and be there."

For Kozak, the aspirations extend beyond banners and trophies.

"I want this 2026 Elon soccer team to be remembered as definitely a winning team, a championship team — a team that did something that has never been done before at Elon," Kozak said. "And I also want people to remember us as great human beings off the field. Making an impact on other people's lives is something that is super powerful."



DESIGN BY
AMELIA METZ

Volleyball seniors reflect on their time at Elon

Seniors prepare for their last season

Alannah Klingsporn
Elon News Network

As Elon volleyball prepares for the bulk of its 2026 season, three seniors are entering their final season in maroon and gold with more than just another season ahead of them. For senior captain Shannon O'Laughlin, volleyball has been more than a sport to her. It's memories that she will have for the rest of her life.

"It has taught me so much — not just about volleyball and life, but about myself," O'Laughlin wrote in an email to Elon News Network. "It has shaped me into the woman

I am today. I am beyond thankful for all of my teammates and coaches that I have had over my last four years."

Members of the volleyball team were not available for an interview with Elon News Network.

O'Laughlin said the team is bringing more energy and passion into the season.

"We have a ton of talent returning, alongside a strong group of freshmen who came in ready to work," O'Laughlin wrote. "That gives us a super deep roster, which is going to pay off for us in the long run. Above all, this team has an incredible amount of drive and passion for the game."

Senior Cameron Lanier credits Elon volleyball for her growth as a player and teammate.

"This program made me feel at home and

gave the ability to thrive as a player," Lanier wrote in an email to ENN. "I've grown so much in the volleyball world and just as a person in general and couldn't have done that without being here."

Lanier hopes the depth of younger players learn to accept the challenges that face them.

"The example I want to set is to never stop trying to grow," Lanier said. "Accept every challenge that comes your way and try to complete them with the best of your ability."

Fellow senior Caroline Berlekamp hopes she can use her experience from her four years to help support others.

"I know I have a lot more knowledge and experience under my belt compared to the younger players on our team," Berlekamp wrote. "I want to be able to provide them

with support whenever it's needed, and use my experience to guide them into my position for when I am gone."

Head coach Matt Troy, entering his second year with the Phoenix, said the seniors' passion matches how much they care for the team.

"This senior class has been instrumental in leading by example and creating the competitive climate on the court and in the weight room," Troy wrote. "As passionate as they are on the court, they are even more caring about their teammates and coaches off the court."

Elon was ranked 9th in the preseason CAA poll, the same as its standing in the conference last season. Still, Troy said he expects the team to continue to improve and commit behind the seniors' guidance.

Defending champions look to keep Elon women's cross country on top



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Participants in the women's cross country opener begin their race, Sept. 4 at Comer Fields. The opener, hosted by Elon University, included High Point University, Queens University of Charlotte and Davidson College, amongst others.

Culture built around confidence, fun has Phoenix chasing another ring

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

The Elon women's cross country team has already shown it can handle the pressure of a championship season. Now, the Phoenix want to prove they can do it again.

Elon enters the 2026 season as the defending Coastal Athletic Association champion, bringing back much of the group that helped capture the conference title last fall.

But head coach Mark Rinker does not want the team to become consumed by the pressure of defending it. Instead, he wants the Phoenix to keep doing what got them there in the first place.

"We want to have fun, we want to train really hard, we want to win," Rinker said.

That balance has become central to the team's identity.

Rinker said the coaching staff encourages the runners to be comfortable being themselves, whether they are at practice or

preparing for the biggest race of the season.

The approach was on full display at last year's CAA Championships.

While other teams appeared serious and focused before the race, Elon's runners were dancing to music at the starting line. Rinker said that if an outsider hadn't seen the end result, they probably wouldn't have thought the team was very serious.

Then the race started.

The Phoenix moved to the front, controlled the race and ultimately won the conference championship. For Rinker, that moment captured what the program has tried to build. The team can take its training seriously without taking itself too seriously.

That culture returns alongside a roster with plenty of experience.

Graduate Katie Blount returns to the group after an outstanding 2025 season, ultimately winning CAA Women's Cross Country Runner Of The Year.

Rinker said Blount's success showed younger runners that hard work and dedication could translate into consistently strong performances.

"She just brings a confidence to everybody," Rinker said. "Especially for developing

younger athletes. They see that through the program, if you come, you work really hard, and you're dedicated to what you do — you can continually get better and improve."

Blount said the goals remain the same.

"The goals are just to kind of stay focused on improvement," Blount said. "Like not getting caught up in all of the different little things that you can worry about in running."

Around her, Elon returns several runners who took strides last season.

Seniors Abby Beville and Hannah Weber went from finishing 11th and 12th at the conference meet the year before to finishing third and fourth last season. Both continued their development on the track, with Beville becoming a conference champion in the mile during track season.

Fellow senior Quinn Smith also made a major jump.

After finishing in the 50s at the CAA Championships previously, she moved up to 15th last season and earned All-CAA honors. Rinker said Smith is now in even better shape than she was at the same point last year, excited about her potential for the year.

That returning core gives Elon a strong foundation as it attempts to defend its

conference title.

The Phoenix will also add new runners who could make an immediate impact.

Rinker singled out international freshmen Brynne Gordon of New Zealand and Millie Gold of Wales as two newcomers to watch, saying both could surprise people and push into Elon's top seven.

With that combination of experience and new talent, the expectations remain high.

"It's a really long season, so trying not to get burnt out, staying strong and obviously the team wants to come back and win another CAA championship," senior Abby Beville said.

But the team rarely talks about winning as its primary focus. Instead, the Phoenix emphasize showing up every day, working hard and enjoying the process.

Rinker said the goal is to create an environment where athletes are excited to come to practice and enjoy being part of the team — saying if Elon can maintain that identity while continuing to develop its runners, another championship could be within reach.

But for the defending champions, the formula remains the same: have fun, work hard and let the results follow.

Men's cross country looks to climb back into CAA's top five

Young Phoenix team enters 2026 season with more experience

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

The Elon men's cross country team is already seeing the difference a year can make.

As the Phoenix enter the 2026 season, several of the young runners who gained their first taste of collegiate competition last fall have returned stronger, faster and more experienced.

Head coach Mark Rinker said the improvement was noticeable almost immediately when the team returned to practice.

"We have a deeper group of guys that's better running faster and workouts than they were same time last year," Rinker said.

That development has given Elon confidence as it looks to improve on last season's seventh-place finish at the Coastal Athletic Association Championships.

The Phoenix entered last season hoping to move up from a fifth-place finish in 2024, but injuries and the inexperience of a young roster ultimately kept the team from reaching that goal.

This year, Rinker said he believes that experience can become an advantage.

Juan Pablo Castillo-Zima, Franklin Wimbish, Luke Chisum and Max Bixler all contributed as freshmen last season and are now entering their second collegiate year with a better understanding of what it takes to compete at the college level.

The transition from high school to college running can be difficult, Rinker said, but the group made significant strides throughout the spring. Chisum was one of the biggest examples.

He qualified for the U.S. U20 Championships in the steeplechase over the summer, an accomplishment Rinker called a "massive" moment for the program.

Now, Chisum is entering the season with the confidence that comes from that experience while also taking on a larger

leadership role as one of Elon's captains.

He will have a veteran teammate to learn from in graduate student Evan Taylor.

Taylor is returning for a fifth year after missing the majority of last season with injury, giving a young Phoenix team an experienced runner at the front of the roster. But Rinker said Taylor's biggest value may not show up on a results sheet.

He described Taylor as calm and steady, someone the younger runners trust and look up to. Taylor said he can't wait to work with the youth on the team.

"I'm super excited," Taylor said. "We have a really young team — six freshmen and six sophomores. But like a lot of super talented guys. So I think we can be really good this year and in the years to come. I'm pumped."

Elon is getting back two more runners from injury as well.

Juniors Josh Driscoll and Jack Kane are both healthy and training well, according to Rinker, providing additional depth to a group that struggled to stay healthy last year.

The Phoenix will also rely on a freshman

class that Rinker believes can make an impact quickly.

Freshmen Trey Kelly, Gavin Hassan and Kevin Steinman are among the newcomers expected to contribute early. Rinker hopes they'll provide additional depth as they develop.

For all the individual improvement, though, the team has one clear benchmark for the season. Rinker wants Elon back in the CAA's top five.

The goal is a step forward from last season, but getting there will require the Phoenix's young runners to turn their development into consistent performances throughout the fall.

For now, Rinker said the signs are encouraging.

The runners are stronger. The team is deeper. And Taylor's return gives a young group an experienced voice to follow.

"We certainly want to improve on last year," Rinker said. "Move ourselves back up into that top-five range that we were hoping to get to last year is really probably the goal."

Two downtown Elon restaurants to close

Mediterranean Deli, Root Trackside
are closing their doors

Miles Hayford & Alexander Siegel
Elon News Network

Downtown Elon will soon have two less restaurants to eat at.

After 15 years in downtown Elon, The Root Trackside is closing Oct. 30. The restaurant announced the news via a social media post. Elon alums Lynn Terrell '97 and Chris Brumbaugh '97, who own The Root, said the closing is bittersweet.

"We're sad, and we won't pretend otherwise," they wrote. "But we're also proud — we built something meaningful. If you've seen a bunch of these bittersweet posts from small, independent spots lately, the industry and economy have been putting up a fight. We've been watching those changes for years and did everything we could to adapt along the way. We think we still came out ahead."

The post had more than 200 likes and 90 comments after just an hour. Terrell and Brumbaugh, who also own Tangent Eat + Bar in downtown Elon, encouraged customers to visit the restaurant in the next few weeks of their "Grand Closing."

"Get your favorite dish one more time," they wrote in the social media post. "Help us close out these 15 years in a style worthy of our blood, sweat, tears, laughter, friendships and memories. We'll be crying in the shed, then walking into the dining room with our brave faces on — if you know, you know."

The Root did not respond to Elon News Network's request for comment.

Another downtown Elon restaurant, Mediterranean Deli, has announced it will be closing just days after The Root announced it



Left, the Mediterrean Deli announced its closing after having a location in downtown Elon for the second time. Right, The Root Trackside is closing Oct. 30.

will shut its doors.

"Thank you Elon Community, for your support over the past few years. We have decided to close this location," the company wrote on a note taped to the front door.

The sign indicates that the restaurant's Chapel Hill location will remain open for catering.

This is the second time the Mediterranean restaurant has closed in Elon.

Formerly located below Park Place Apartments, Mediterranean Deli shut its doors in 2022 after four years because it was not economically feasible. The restaurant reopened downtown in March 2024.

Burlington City Council set to revisit ban on backyard chickens

Survey shows majority of Burlington residents in favor of chickens

Lilly Molina
Elon News Network

Burlington resident Frank Poppa would sing to one of his six hens and she would sing back to him. Not only did his hens provide fresh eggs to the Poppa family of five, but he said they also felt like family.

So in 2023, when the police showed up at his doorstep ordering him to get rid of his backyard chickens and that if he didn't it would be an arrestable offense, Poppa was shocked.

"We love them, they all have names and they feed our kids, so it's strange to be kind of like 'You're doing a bad thing,'" Poppa said.

Dubbing himself, "chicken daddy," he said he misses his chickens.

"They were awesome. It's a good thing to wake up, sing to them in the morning and come home and see them," Poppa said.

Poppa's encounter with the law came after a 3-2 vote back in the spring of 2021 where the Burlington City Council voted against a proposal that would have allowed chickens on people's private property.



CHICKENS RESTING UNDER THEIR COOP AT THE BLUE'S FARM LOCATED IN BURLINGTON.

"They just didn't have a reason," he said. "It's just like, 'That's the way it is.'"

Five years later, the new city council is now revisiting this ban.

The move comes after a city survey this summer found that 72% of nearly 1,500 respondents supported allowing backyard chickens.

"There's clearly an understanding and a support from the council that mirrors the support of the community," Poppa said.

Council member Ian Baltutis was in

favor of backyard chickens back in 2021 and that feeling has not changed. He said he sees backyard poultry as a form of food security for residents.

"People are asking for the freedom to do with their property what they want and keep backyard chickens, kind of in the same way you keep a dog in your backyard, except with the added benefit of some discussion about how it impacts resiliency of our food supply chain," Baltutis said.

Poppa said two streets down from where he lives, backyard chickens are allowed.

"I just happen to be close to the county line, but it's just kind of silly," Poppa said.

An ordinance was drafted in 2021 that would have permitted residents to have up to four hens. Roosters were not allowed.

The ordinance also stated coops were required and had to be well ventilated. Enclosures had to be covered and attached to the coop.

According to a study done by Texas A&M, only 2.8% of owners vaccinate their flocks. Forty-nine percent of owners said they struggle with predators targeting their flock and 41% said their main struggle is deadline with disease and health of their flock.

For those worried about rodents and sanitation, the Center for Disease Control

said proper management of chicken enclosures can help minimize those risks.

"I think the biggest thing is people think they're gross or they think they're dirty," Poppa said. "If you don't take care of them, then they can be, but they're not just inherently dirty animals."

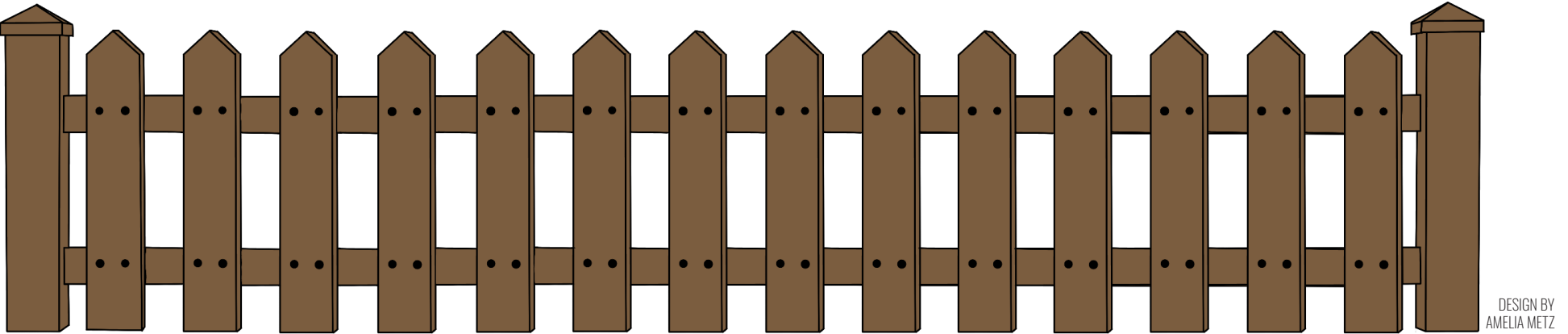
Besides cleaning up after the birds, the CDC says it's important for owners to wash their hands after collecting eggs or touching their chickens and to keep up with vaccinations to prevent disease.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in January of this year there were only 10 backyard chickens in North Carolina that were affected by the avian flu, and they were all in Franklin County.

Baltutis said that within the next work session or two, the council will revisit the previously drafted ordinance regarding backyard chickens. Then they will schedule a public hearing that will help them make changes to the original draft.

For supporters, the issue comes down to more than just keeping chickens, but it's about having the freedom to produce their own food.

"We should be allowed to take care of ourselves," Poppa said. "If you want to produce your own food, you should be able to do that."



DESIGN BY AMELIA METZ



Senior Dia Haspel, left, points to senior Kiley Sherlock, right, when the hosts asked who had two slots left until bingo during the SGA x SUB Bingo on Sept. 3 in McKinnon Hall.

ETHAN WU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Executive President of Elon's Student Government Association Michael Swartz promotes the Sept. 9 SGA election date during the intermission of the SGA x SUB Bingo on Sept. 3 in McKinnon Hall.

ETHAN WU | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Members of Elon University's rap and R&B organization, Limitless, tables during the university's organization fair Sept. 2 on Young Commons. The event offered the chance for students to see the different on-campus clubs and organizations open to them at Elon. "Everyone is so sweet, and it's really great to know all the organizations that I didn't know were at Elon," freshman Cara Sullivan said while exploring the fair.

ALI ELSHEIKH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Freshman running back Kameron McDowell-Moore powers past two Davidson College defenders in Elon's 38-0 win Sept. 5. McDowell-Moore rushed for 88 yards and two touchdowns in his second game as a Phoenix. McDowell-Moore also was named the Coastal Athletic Association Rookie of the Week. "Kamerin's electric," head coach Tony Trisciani said. "He's slippery, and he runs hard for his size. Runs behind his pads. Motor never stops."

KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Students gather around a picnic table and paint Sept. 4 during the Planting for the Planet event at the Elon Community Garden.

LILY MOSBACHER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Aayra Potti
Columnist

DESIGN BY AMELIA METZ

A quick, rapid-fire round up of the latest political news impacting Alamance County, North Carolina and the nation.

LOCAL

1. Expansion of Burlington City Council
2. Alamance Board of Elections Sunday voting

Talks are underway on the topic of expanding the number of seats on the Burlington City Council. Currently there are five seats, but members have been heavily discussing the possibility of seven seats, as well as the specifics of district representation.

Several North Carolina counties have eliminated Sunday early voting after local election boards did not reach unanimous schedule agreements. In contrast, Alamance County voted unanimously to retain early voting on Sunday, October 25th. Voting rights advocates have noted that removing Sunday hours removes a necessary window for Black voters and those balancing heavy work or caregiving duties.

STATE

1. North Carolina Senate race
2. Standby on stringent voting rules

North Carolina's open U.S. Senate seat is currently being contested by former Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and Republican Michael Whatley. Cooper is currently leading in the polls by 11% according to an Elon University poll. This cycle, 35 Senate seats are up for election, and Republicans are entering the 2026 midterms with a 53-47 majority.

New North Carolina Board of Elections rules regarding voter ID and mail-in ballots were unanimously approved by the NC Rules Review Commission, allowing county boards to reject a voter's ballot by a majority vote. Previously, it required a unanimous vote. Public complaints have initiated a legislative review that will delay the new guidelines until after midterm elections. Some absentee ballot changes were approved via two numbered memos.

NATIONAL

1. Rush to avoid government shutdown
2. Lawsuits over mail-in voting

After a five-week recess, the United States House of Representatives is focused on passing a spending bill to avert a government shutdown. This stopgap bill serves as a bridge to keep money flowing while the larger budget is debated. It has faced some controversy, as there are partisan divides over a federal ban on specific chemical hemp products and over the executive branch's power to reallocate federal grant funding without going through Congress.

Last Wednesday, 24 states filed a lawsuit in response to an executive order issued by the Trump Administration limiting mail-in voting rules ahead of the upcoming midterm elections. An increasing rate of mail-in votes that have been rejected for arriving late in primaries this year have officials concerned about the delivering of ballots in the November elections.

GLOBAL

1. U.S. and Iran
2. Canadian tariff escalation

On the night of Aug. 30th, after weeks of no attacks, military strikes were exchanged between the United States and Iran. The strikes on Iran are now in their second week, reportedly following attempted Iranian attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

Following months of tension and weeks of back-and-forth, the collapse of bilateral trade negotiations led to a 50% US tariff on over \$20 billion in Canadian imports. The Canadian retaliatory tariffs went into effect on September 8th.

SOURCES: Elon News Network, Alamance News, Burlington Times-News, WRAL News, Politico, State Affairs, NC Insider, Raleigh News & Observer, The Guardian, The New York Times, CBS News, The Washington Post, CNN, Associated Press, Al-Jazeera

Burlington City Council could face seat vacancy after council member's House campaign



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

North Carolina House Democratic candidate Ian Baltutis meets voters during Elon University's organization fair Sept. 2 on Young Commons.

Council Member Ian Baltutis running for NC House seat

Emma Perman
Special Events Coordinator

The Burlington City Council could be faced with filling a vacant seat if Council Member Ian Baltutis is elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives in November.

Baltutis, who was elected to the city council in 2025, is running for the state House District 63 seat. He previously served three terms as Burlington's mayor from 2015 to 2021 before returning to the city council last year. The city currently has five council members, including Baltutis.

Baltutis said his potential move to the state legislature would mean leaving his position on the council.

"So when I win in November, I'll have to resign from my seat on the City Council," Baltutis said. "The council will then get to appoint somebody in my seat."

The remaining four council members would be responsible for selecting someone to serve the rest of the term, according to John Vernon, public information specialist for the city of Burlington.

A vacancy would not immediately prevent city council from conducting city business, according to Vernon.

"The council is designed to function if there's a council member on vacation," Vernon said. "They are down to four council members or someone has a reason they can't be at a meeting, then council functions as usual with a four-member body."

Baltutis would not be involved in selecting his replacement, Vernon said. The city does not have a specific deadline for filling the potential vacancy, according to Vernon.

"I think that they would want to fill it as soon as they could with giving themselves

enough time to make the right decision," Vernon said.

Burlington has previously allowed community members to apply for vacant council positions before the remaining members vote on an appointment, Baltutis said. He said he hopes the next council member will remain engaged with residents.

"I would hope that they would find somebody who shares my desires to increase civic engagement, to represent the diversity of our community and find somebody who's willing to put in the time and effort to continue to be available and accessible to the community in the way that I have," Baltutis said.

Baltutis' potential departure would come less than a year after he was elected to his current city council term. City officials certified his election in November 2025, when he received 4,106 votes and was elected to a term expiring in December 2029. The decision to pursue the State House seat comes after previous democratic nominee, Whitney Olive, dropped out of the race. Baltutis said his original intention was to complete his four-year council term.

"I think it's a very valid concern," Baltutis said, when asked about residents questioning his decision to seek another office so soon after being elected. "When I got elected to this seat on council, my goal was to serve a full four years. Ultimately, with the support of my fellow council members and family and community, decided to take that next step."

For now, Baltutis remains on the Burlington City Council as he continues his campaign against Republican Ryan Moffitt for the North Carolina House. The future of his council seat and who could take his place, will come after voters cast their ballots in November.

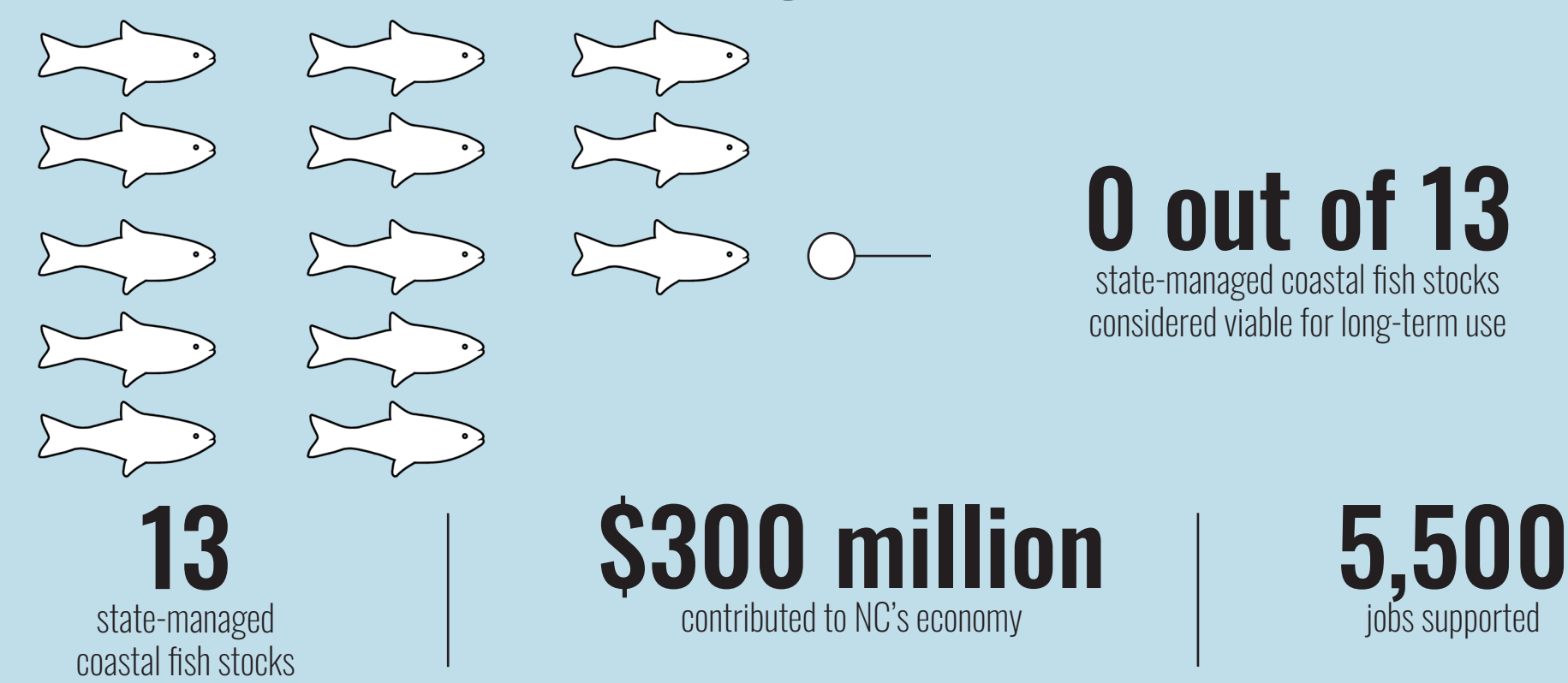
"I'm not going anywhere," Baltutis said. "I will continue to serve Burlington and greater Alamance County."

NC coastal fish stocks not viable for long term, judge says

Judge rules state failed to protect 13 state-managed fisheries

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

NC coastal fisheries at a glance



GRAPHIC BY AMELIA METZ

North Carolina failed to protect the state's coastal fisheries, according to a state superior court ruling. None of the 13 state-managed coastal fish stocks are viable for long-term use.

Judge Brian Collins ruled in favor of the Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina following a six-year lawsuit. According to the court's ruling, the state mishandled the coastal fish stocks and caused depleted populations of southern flounder, shrimp, speckled trout and more.

The nonprofit organization and 86 citizen plaintiffs filed the lawsuit in 2020, saying the state has a legal responsibility to keep fisheries healthy over the long term. Plaintiffs said overfishing and methods like shrimp trawling contributed to lowering coastal animal populations.

Fisheries need to maintain a strong habitat and population in order for them to be healthy. If the habitat is damaged, fish can't hide from predators and the population will decrease. If the population

gets too low or too high, it can decrease the reproduction rate of the species.

According to North Carolina Sea Grant, in 2021 N.C.'s commercial seafood industry contributed around \$300 million and 5,500 jobs to the state's economy.

Joel Fodrie, director of the Duke University Marine Lab, recently led a study on the current state of N.C. fisheries and how the state can improve fishing stocks. Fodrie said that while the state has the tools and management needed, one point of discussion is figuring out how to apply these resources for the future.

"Over the scope of the data we could bring to bear, it's a system that's just always changing and evolving," Fodrie said. "You're trying to manage towards what appears to be a very, very, very moving target."

Mike Kingston, Elon University professor of environmental studies, said that shrimp trawling directly impacts the habitat and environments of the coast.

"They're destroying a lot of the three-dimensional structure of the bottom," Kingston said. "Oyster reefs are being impacted, and soft coral reefs and other organisms that live on the bottom are being impacted by this trawling."

According to the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, North Carolina is the only east coast state to allow inland shrimp trawling. The General Assembly introduced a bill in March 2025 with measures to ban inland shrimp trawling. The ban was met with large opposition from N.C. fishers, and House Republicans dropped the measures from future iterations of the bill.

Collins ordered attorneys from both sides of the case to meet and submit a joint report with future considerations. This joint report will determine a timeline for the remedy phase, potentially deciding what changes are made to fishery policies. Kingston said he'd like to see the state implement no-take areas, parts where fishing is not allowed in any capacity, to

allow fish populations to regrow at their own pace.

"When the fish are reproducing in those no-take areas, when they get large enough where do you think they go?" Kingston said. "Do you think they stay in there or do they go elsewhere, they say 'I'm going to go elsewhere.'"

Fodrie said a survey he conducted found many recreational and commercial fishers were unsatisfied with state management's transparency, and state management was unsatisfied with low engagement from fishers. Fodrie said that while this ruling is a step forward, he hopes people see it less as an ending and more as an opportunity for cooperative growth.

"I think the real key thing is what happens now," Fodrie said. "If we find a process that comes out of this to generate more high quality data that can feed into wise decisions, I would hope that many people would be very open-minded to that being a real positive."

ADVERTISEMENT

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Elon Community Church

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Upcoming Elon Performing Arts production highlights community, resilience after 9/11



KARSYN VANN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The cast of “Come From Away” practices a song at their first table read Aug. 31 in Scott Studios.

‘Come From Away’ will run Oct. 30 to Nov. 7 in McCrary Theatre

Karsyn Vann
Elon News Network

Audiences will experience an untold story of hope, resilience and the power of community when the curtain rises on Elon University’s upcoming production of “Come From Away,” the fall musical of the 2026-27 season.

“Come From Away” is a musical written by Irene Sankoff and David Hein that tells the true story of 7,000 airline passengers stranded in Gander, Newfoundland, after U.S. airspace closed on September 11, 2001. The show will run in McCrary Theatre from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7.

Director of the show, assistant professor of music theatre, Jacob Brent, said that a lot of people misunderstand what the show is about. He said it is easy for people to describe the show as just the “9/11 musical,” but that the description is off-putting and inaccurate.

“It’s really a story about 9/12,” Brent said. “It’s not about that horrific event. It’s about what happened the morning after.”

Elon University is one of the first universities to acquire the rights to this show. According to Brent, the creators of the musical, Sankoff and Hein, based the musical

on real-life interviews they conducted with the stranded passengers and locals in Gander. He said many lines and song lyrics in the show are the exact words spoken by real people during those interviews.

“Rarely in musical theater do we get to do something that’s based on actual real people that are still alive and around,” Brent said. “It’s daunting for sure but also exciting.”

Brent said research has been key in the rehearsal process, especially since none of the cast was alive when 9/11 happened. He said he shared some of his own experiences living through 9/11 during rehearsals for the cast to truly understand the horror and confusion of the time.

“There has been a lot of work going on to educate the cast, because we are shining a light on this moment in history,” Brent said. “We just want to make sure that we’re honoring everyone.”

Senior Madelynn Forcier plays “Diane,” a middle-aged woman from Texas who unexpectedly finds love while stranded in Gander. Forcier said she has watched every interview available of the real-life Diane to craft who she is and portray her with as much nuance as possible.

“Honestly, it has been pretty hard because she’s not a celebrity and there isn’t that much information other than this story,” Forcier said. “I’m just digging what I can.”

Forcier said playing a real person has

some challenges, as there is this pressure to get her story right, but she also said she appreciates having a groundwork for her to build off of and expand upon.

Sophomore Jakob Robinson, who plays “Nick,” said that talking to his parents and directors really helped him understand the weight of what it felt like to live during 9/11. He said one story that particularly stuck out to him was his mother going to the grocery store after it happened and seeing Muslim women crying in the parking lot.

“I just had this understanding that, regardless of where you were, in America or if you were on one of the planes diverted to Newfoundland, your life is completely flipped upside down,” Robinson said.

According to Robinson, doing “Come From Away” expanded his viewpoint on 9/11. He said he was aware of all the news coverage and the fear and uncertainty, but was never taught about people’s stories as it was happening.

“I understand the real people behind the characters and their personal experiences now rather than just the knowledge and facts of the event that was fed to the American people,” Robinson said.

Sophomore Samantha Probst said the kindness, generosity and resilience of the people in the show have inspired her.

“These evil, horrible people tried to crumble America and our people,” Probst said. “But ultimately, we came together because of it.”

Probst plays “Beverly,” the first female captain of an American Airlines commercial plane. Probst said playing this character gave her a new perspective on 9/11 and what it must have felt like to have been a pilot versus a passenger while planes were actively being diverted.

“Pilots had a job to do and they couldn’t break down, Beverly couldn’t break down,” Probst said. “I would have been terrified and I can’t imagine being that strong.”

She said the community of Gander really came together to help support each other, during one of the darkest times in America.

“Even though we were being tested with this tragic event and loss, this show explores how some good came out of it,” Probst said. “People were looking out for each other and building this community for strangers they didn’t even know.”

Forcier said the crux of this story is about the power of humanity and kindness in tragedy. She said it is hard for her to imagine such a strong reaction if something like 9/11 occurred in 2026. Forcier said she hopes

people leave the show feeling like they could be a little kinder to people.

“

WE WANT THIS PROFOUND, BEAUTIFUL STORY TO BE INCORPORATED INTO PEOPLE’S LIVES. THE ENERGY OF THE SHOW NEEDS TO RIPPLE OUT AND RESONATE SO THE ESSENCE OF THE SHOW WILL CARRY ON.

JACOB BRENT
DIRECTOR OF ‘COME FROM AWAY’

“I feel like in 2026 it’s unheard of for these people who are from a different country to care so much about thousands of people that they don’t know, and to give them the clothes off their back and the food in their house just because they know that they’re going through a hard time,” Forcier said. “It’s magical.”

Brent said a lot has changed since 2001 and he said he is curious about how the audience will perceive the musical now. He said he hopes the time and distance away from the event won’t discredit the importance of the messages.

“We want this profound, beautiful story to be incorporated into people’s lives,” Brent said. “The energy of the show needs to ripple out and resonate so the essence of the show will carry on.”

Robinson said he still feels the effects of 9/11 and how it has shaped America even though he wasn’t alive. He said he feels honored to perform this show on the 25th anniversary of 9/11 because it is a narrative that not many people know about.

“This is a chance to expose people to a different side of a well-known story,” Robinson said.

“Come From Away” will run in McCrary Theatre with evening shows at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 30 and 31, Nov. 5, 6 and 7, as well as matinee shows at 2 p.m. Nov. 1 and 7. Tickets are available starting October 9 on the Elon Performing Arts website.



KARSYN VANN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior Madelynn Forcier, middle, who plays Diane, and sophomore Jakob Robinson, who plays Nick, run lines during a rehearsal for a scene from “Come From Away” on Aug. 31 in Scott Studios.