THE PENDULUM

ELONNEWSNETWORK.COM | WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2026 | ELON, NORTH CAROLINA | VOLUME 56, EDITION 11

BASKETBALL

SPECIAL EDITION



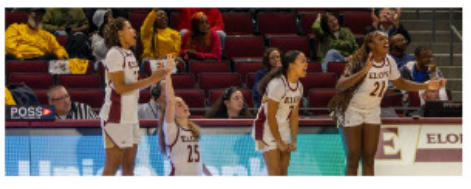




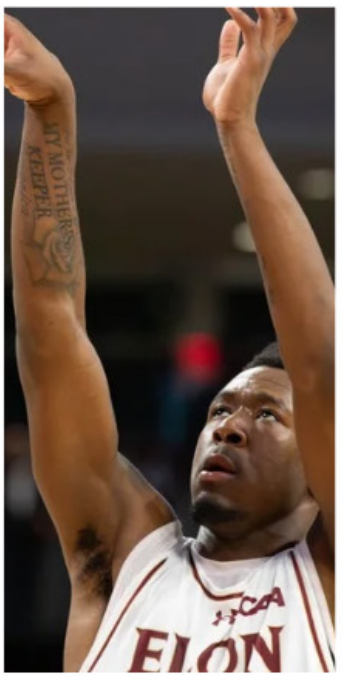


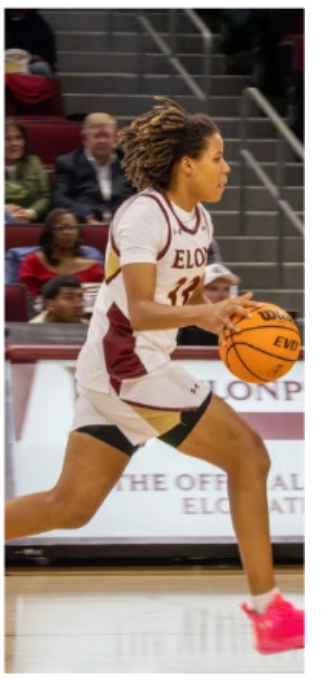


















Men's basketball adds size to roster as season begins

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THE PENDULUM

A PUBLICATION OF

ELON NEWS NETWORK

ESTABLISHED 1974 | VOLUME 56, EDITION 11

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ENN seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty, as well as serve as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

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ENN is committed to accurate coverage. When factual errors are made, we correct them promptly and in full, both online and in print. Online corrections state the error and the change at the top of the article. Corrections from the previous week's print edition appear on this page.

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CORRECTIONS

In the Nov. 4 edition of The Pendulum in the story "Democrat Roy Cooper flips U.S. Senate seat," the percentage of the vote that Cooper secured was not listed. He won 58.72% of the vote. In the story, "Democrats win in 12 Alamance County races, six incumbents lose," Michael Byrne's name was spelled incorrectly. In that story, District 63 and 64's populations were incorrectly noted. District 63's population is 83,540 and District 64's population is 87,875. Elon News Network regrets these errors.

Home game schedule

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Nov. 13 vs. Chattanooga at 7 p.m.

Nov. 21 vs. Morehead State at 7 p.m.

Dec. 3 vs. James Madison at 7 p.m.

Dec. 6 vs. NC Wesleyan at 2 p.m.

Dec. 16 vs. Longwood at 7 p.m.

Dec. 19 vs. Montreat College at 7 p.m.

Dec. 31 vs. NC A&T at 2 p.m.

Jan. 11 vs. UNCW at 8:30 p.m.

Jan. 14 vs. Hofstra at 6:30 p.m.

Jan. 16 vs. Stony Brook at 7 p.m.

Jan. 28 vs. Northeastern at 7 p.m.

Jan. 30 vs. Monmouth at 7 p.m.

Feb. 13 vs. Hampton at 7 p.m.

Feb. 25 vs. Campbell at 7 p.m.

Feb. 27 vs. William & Mary at 7 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Nov. 11 vs. ETSU at 7 p.m.

Nov. 19 vs. Liberty at 11 a.m.

Dec. 2 vs. Appalachian State at 7 p.m.

Dec. 20 vs. UNCG at 1 p.m.

Dec. 29 vs. NC Wesleyan at 2 p.m.

Jan. 8 vs. William & Mary at 7 p.m.

Jan. 10 vs. Stony Brook at 1 p.m.

Jan. 17 vs. NC A&T at 1 p.m.

Jan. 29 vs. Hampton at 7 p.m.

Jan. 31 vs. College of Charleston at 1 p.m.

Feb. 14 vs. Hofstra at 1 p.m.

Feb. 19 vs. Drexel at 7 p.m.

Feb. 21 vs. UNCW at 7 p.m.

March 4 vs. Campbell at 7 p.m.

CAA Basketball Conference 2026-2027



‘Hit the glass’: Phoenix men’s basketball looks to fire up the court

Junior guard Bryson Cokley, head coach Billy Taylor on what to expect this season

Addison Hinson
Elon News Network



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR
University of North Carolina Greensboro sophomore guard RJ Greer attempts to block Elon University senior guard Randall Pettus II from making a three-point shot Nov. 6.

Sixteen players — that’s how many fill up the Elon men’s basketball roster. Ten of those 16 players are new to the team.

After losing nine players to the transfer portal two seasons ago, and five last season, the Phoenix roster was in desperate need of a rebuild.

Head coach Billy Taylor isn’t one to dwell on the past — he’s looking forward to the opportunities the new players bring.

“I’m really excited about this team. I think our depth is the thing that’s a little bit unique to this year’s roster,” Taylor said. “We try to be strategic, making sure that we got guys that weren’t duplicate skill sets, but we would have enough competition at every position to make us a deep team that can really last the rigors of the season.”

Elon faced a series of injuries and players leaving for the portal that left the team in a shaky spot coming into the 2026-2027 season. However, Taylor said he views it as an opportunity to restructure the team.

“We’ve really built the program. That was our goal coming in, was to build it holistically,” Taylor said. “Yes, build up the roster, but build up the structure, especially as you have the transfer portal and dealing with the demands of the transfer portal.”

Taylor highlighted members of the front court like transfer senior center Hunter Harding and freshman forward Caleb Zhu, who stand at 7-foot-1 and 6-foot-10, respectively, as players who can make an impact on the team through their experience, athleticism and height.

Elon’s roster last season only had one player over 6-foot-9. This year they have four.

“That kind of size and mass should help us in the CAA,” Taylor said. “Then you’ve got Josh Dalton, Iker Garmendia. Those guys with their length and athleticism, quickness and speed around the basket should really help us.”

Taylor believes that his group of incoming guards will bring leadership and playoff experience to the team as they look to make a deep run in the season.

“You talk about the leadership that you get from someone like Cam Thrower, who’s been to the NCAA tournament. He’s a grad, so older player just understands the game and the system that we’re running,” Taylor said. “Then you add in Raúl Villar, Isaiah Mbeng. Isaiah with his experience in the CAA, playing at William & Mary was very successful as a freshman at William and Mary. Getting guards like that just really changes things for us.”

As for his small — but solid — group of returners, Taylor brought up junior guard Bryson Cokley as a player to watch out for in the upcoming season.

“If you look at it, even last year when he got more and more defensive attention, his numbers stayed very consistent, very efficient from three,” Taylor said. “He’s a guy that brings a lot to the table in terms of his offensive efficiency.”

Last year, Cokley was 39.7% from three, which had him ranked as the third best in the CAA.

Taylor isn’t the only one recognizing Cokley’s offensive prowess – Cokley was recently recognized as a member of the Preseason All-CAA Second Team. While Cokley was appreciative of the accolade, he said it wouldn’t take away from his desire to work hard and improve his game.

“It’s an honor. I appreciate the preseason recognition, but it’s preseason at the end of the day. I have to go out and still do my job every day in and day out,” Cokley said. “I’m just focusing on making every game a great game.”

Cokley transferred from George Mason University last year, and his decision to stay with the Phoenix meant that the team would maintain a reliable shooter. Cokley credited his evolution from newcomer to ‘the guy’ as one of the main reasons he wanted to continue to play in maroon and gold.

“I was going to be the guy on the team,” Cokley said. “Guys started to look up to me a little bit, being a mentor, being a leader to some of the younger guys. That’s been a major, major change.”

The Phoenix opened their season up on the road against the University of Columbia, who they defeated 84-71. Elon led points in the paint the entire game, and outscored the Lions in each half.

> “GUYS STARTED TO LOOK UP TO ME A LITTLE BIT, BEING A MENTOR, BEING A LEADER TO SOME OF THE YOUNGER GUYS. THAT’S BEEN A MAJOR, MAJOR CHANGE.
>
> **BRYSON COKLEY**
> ELON JUNIOR GUARD

In an interview before the game, Taylor said playing teams like Columbia will be a necessary challenge for the progression of the team as they look to conquer the CAA.

“Our non-conference schedule will really challenge us. They got a terrific front court and some young guards that are really talented,” Taylor said. “That kind of schedule should really prepare us for CAA play. We’re gonna have to work, we have to be ready. We won’t be a finished product on November 2. Can we work ourselves to be in that really good team?”

While the team might not be a finished product yet, Cokley is ready to get back on the court and into the flow he found himself at the end of last season — by heckling the Columbia fans.

“It’s gonna be fun. Playing on the road is more fun,” Cokley said. “You know, talk a little trash to the crowd a little bit, get the crowd going. It boosts confidence.”

Despite trouncing Columbia, Elon still has more to do to reach its goals. The two teams were dead even in rebounds. Cokley said getting ahead on the glass is imperative to success.

“Coach talks a lot about rebounding, hitting the glass. We have to do a better job at that,” Cokley said. “Beating them to the glass, punching them in the mouth first, and winning the war on the glass,” Cokley said.

Taylor thinks that the team can be successful at a high level if they can improve their rebounding efficiency. Cokley said that Taylor believes having the best rebounding percentage is the key to a CAA championship.

In the past decade, Elon’s rebounding margin trended in the negative numbers. Since Taylor arrived five years ago, the margin has been steadily rising. After losing 7-foot-4 center Matthew Van Komen after the 2024-2025 season, the margins plummeted once again.

Of the top-50 rebounding teams in Division I basketball last season, only two had losing records.

Elon’s pre-conference slate will be nothing short of challenging, as they face off against teams such as South Carolina, Richmond and NC State. Cokley is ready for that challenge.

“It’ll prepare us, mentally and physically, for the strength and the brutality of the CAA,” Cokley said.

“We’ve got to be able to control the paint, whether to score points in the paint or just control the backboards,” Taylor said. “That’s something that’s going to be really important for us: can we rebound the basketball at a high level?”

While the Phoenix need to kick off the pre-CAA play hot, Cokley is already looking to the future.

“We want to win a CAA championship. I want to be a major impact for this team offensively and defensively. It’s another way I have to step up,” Cokley said. “I want to win Player of the Year. I have to be the best player on the best team, so we have to win.”



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR
Elon freshman forward Caleb Zhu dunks the ball during his game against the University of North Carolina Greensboro on Nov. 6 at Schar Center.

Players to watch

LaNae' Corbett



COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Junior

2025-2026 3rd Team All-CAA

11.4 average points per game in 2025-2026 season

3.7 average rebounds per game in 2025-2026 season

23 average points through the first two games of the 2026-2027 season

"I love the post. Born and raised in the post for basketball," Corbett said.

Tamia Watkins



COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Sophomore

2025-2026 CAA All-Rookie Team

7.7 average points per game in 2025-2026 season

5.6 average rebounds per game in 2025-2026 season

*5.6 rebounds is the second most by an Elon rookie in the past decade.

"I just wanted to be dominant. I wanted to show my coaches and teammates I can be that player for y'all," Watkins said about her performance last season.

Bryson Cokley



COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Junior

2025-2026 Preseason All-CAA 2nd Team

12.9 average points per game as a starter in 2025-2026 season

39.7% 3-point percentage in 2025-2026 season

"We saw his game really take off and elevate in that last part of the season, where we just saw a glimpse of now what we're seeing every day in terms of the type of production, the type of tenacity, the type of competitive spirit that's going to allow him to be an elite player," head coach Billy Taylor said.

Hunter Harding



COURTESY OF ELON ATHLETICS

Senior

7'1"

77% field goal percentage in 2025-2026 season

8 assists and 8 rebounds in 2026-2027 season opening game against Columbia

"We've got some size, some athleticism in the front court that hopefully can allow us to play with that physicality and that toughness," Taylor said.

Phoenix add Power Four experience with assistant coach hire

Steve Robinson joins Elon men's basketball program as special assistant to the head coach

Monika Jurevicius
Elon News Network

Steve Robinson retired in 2025 from the NCAA after a 42-year coaching career that consisted of working with four Power Four basketball programs, eight Final Fours appearances, winning three national championships and sending over 60 college athletes over to professional leagues like the NBA. However, after moving to Elon to be closer to family, Robinson made his own comeback to the game. Now, he's special assistant to Elon head coach Billy Taylor, after having conversations last season about joining the team.

"I'd come out and watch them practice a little bit and come to several games just to watch and participate from afar," Robinson said. "I enjoyed it and it helped me realize I missed basketball."

> I CAN'T DO ALL THE STUFF THAT I USED TO WHEN I WAS A LITTLE YOUNG PUPPY OUT THERE RUNNING AND RECRUITING AND DOING ALL THESE THINGS, BUT I TRY TO BE A VOICE AND TRY TO GIVE THEM SOME IDEAS.
>
> **STEVE ROBINSON**
> SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE HEAD COACH

For Robinson, the game wasn't the only reason that he came out of retirement — it was also because of Taylor. After seeing his coaching, Robinson admired the way Taylor took care of his team, which led him to wanting to help the team have even more success than years before.



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Steve Robinson — special assistant to the head coach of Elon men's basketball — listens in a team huddle during a timeout of the Phoenix's home opener against UNC-Greensboro on Nov. 6 at Schar Center.

"Steve Robinson brings an incredible wealth of knowledge and experience to our program," Taylor said in an Elon Athletics press release when Robinson first joined the team. "He's been part of championship teams at the highest level of college basketball, and his perspective will help our coaches and student-athletes."

Alongside being an assistant coach at blue-blood schools like University of Arizona, University of Kansas and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Robinson was head coach at both the University of Tulsa and Florida State University for seven seasons. While his day-to-day responsibilities vary now, he noted that working and adapting to the resources that the Coastal Athletic Association and Elon have in comparison to the bigger conferences he's worked in has allowed him to still keep up his coaching philosophy — winning and having success during the season.

"I can't do all the stuff that I used to when I was a little young puppy out there running and recruiting and doing all these things, but I try to be a voice and try to give them some ideas about different things I see," Robinson said.

That experience can be seen on the sideline — whether Robinson is giving insight in the pregame huddle, or encouraging big guys like Caleb Zhu to establish their prowess in the paint.

As Robinson transitioned from fan to coach, he emphasized that building relationships with the Phoenix basketball program has been the most meaningful part of his time being back in basketball. Getting the team hyped up to put on an Elon jersey and run through the Schar Center tunnel is what Robinson wants the team to be excited about, but also something for Phoenix fans to root for this season.

"You never know when your year is your year," Robinson said. "Trying to get people to relish that opportunity to come and support because it's a wonderful time, in terms of participating in sports. I think that our guys will fight hard and we just hope that the fans will kind of come out and support the team. They worked hard. They've been working hard for a long time now."

Success isn't measured by points to Robinson, it's seeing the Phoenix build on a system that is helping them play with intensity and vigor during anyone they play against. He said that the Phoenix just have to take it one game at a time.

STEVE ROBINSON RESUME

42 years of coaching experience

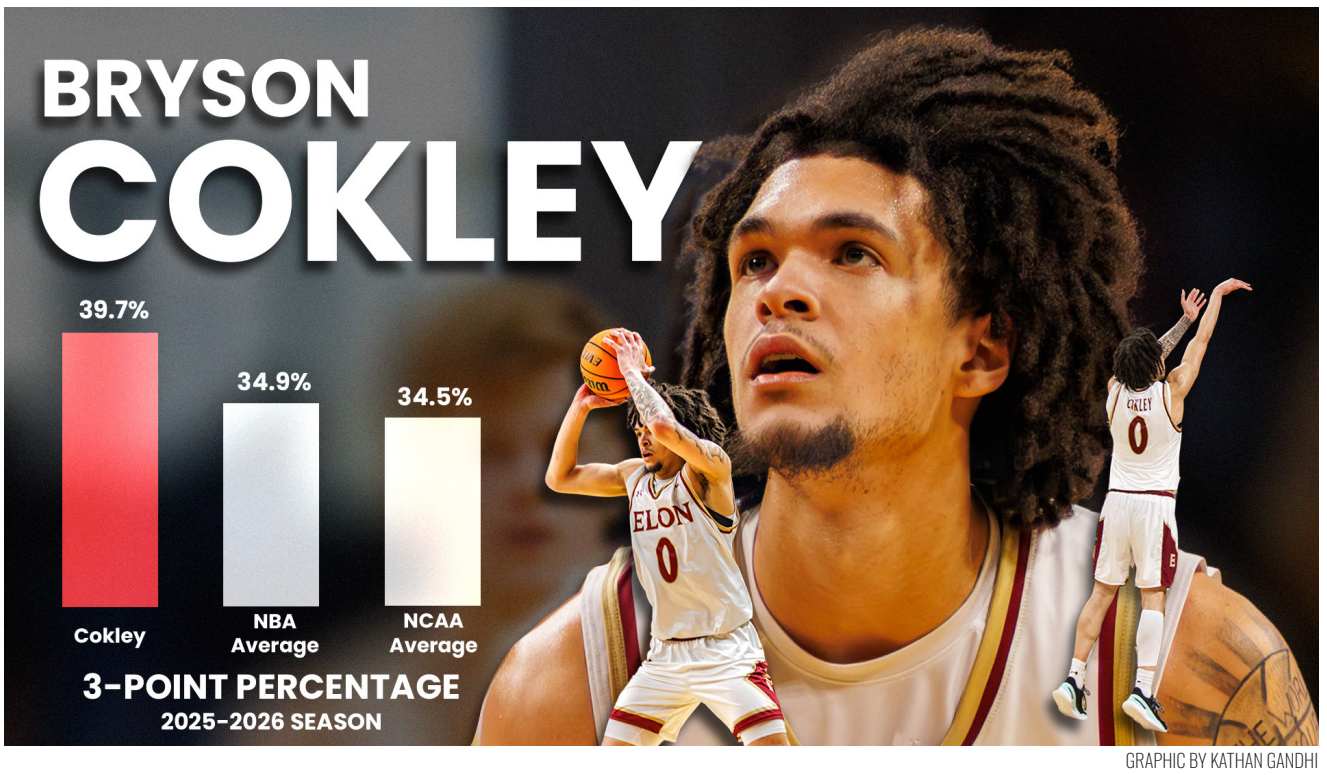
Assistant coach at Arizona, Kansas, North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Head coach at Tulsa, Florida State

Eight Final Fours

Three National Championships

Elon basketball by the numbers

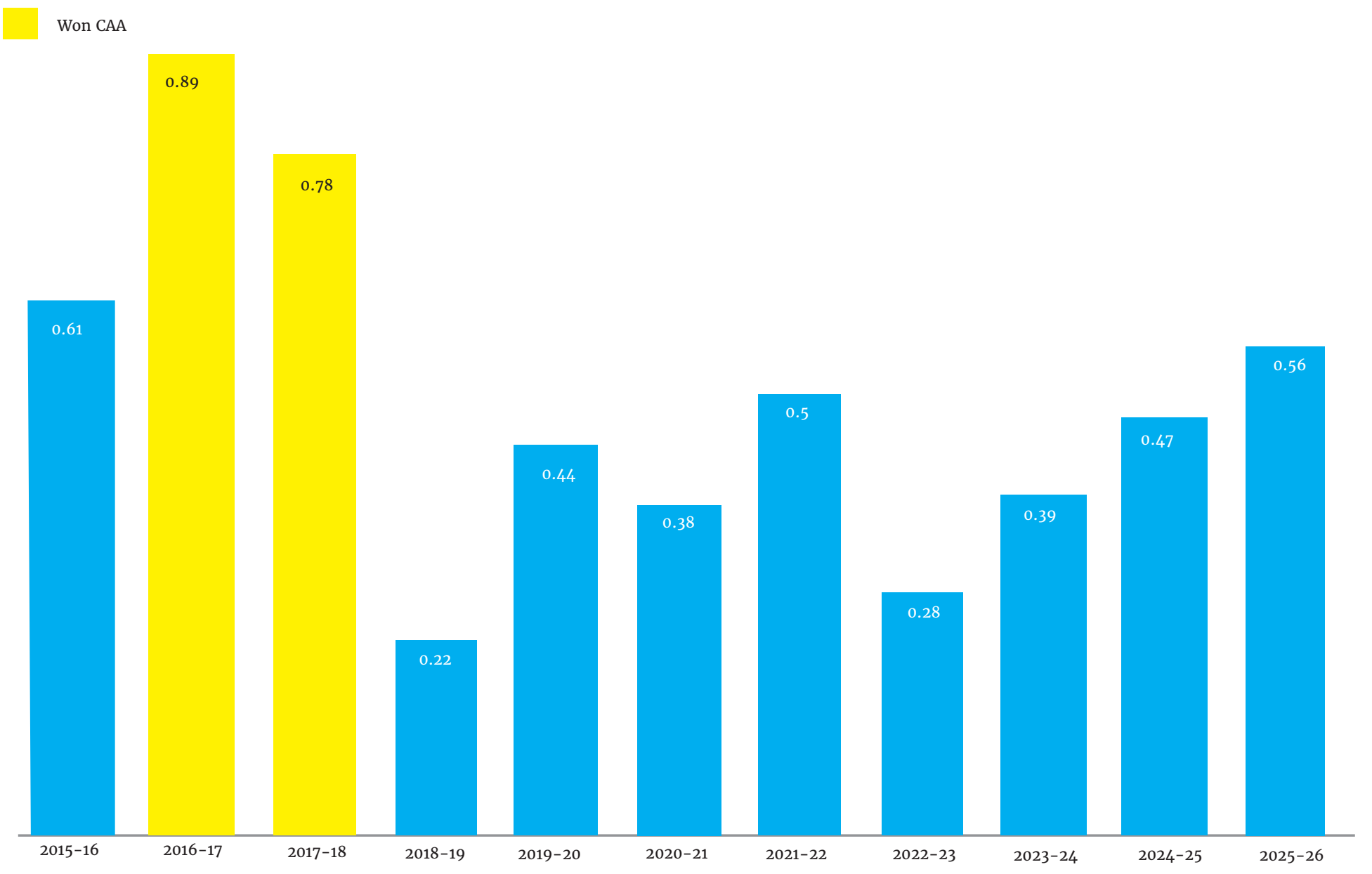


GRAPHIC BY KATHAN GANDHI

After transferring to Elon last season, junior guard Bryson Cokley has become Elon's top shooting threat from beyond the arc. Cokley shot 39.7% on 3-pointers last season, a level above the average NCAA Division I percentage and NBA percentage.

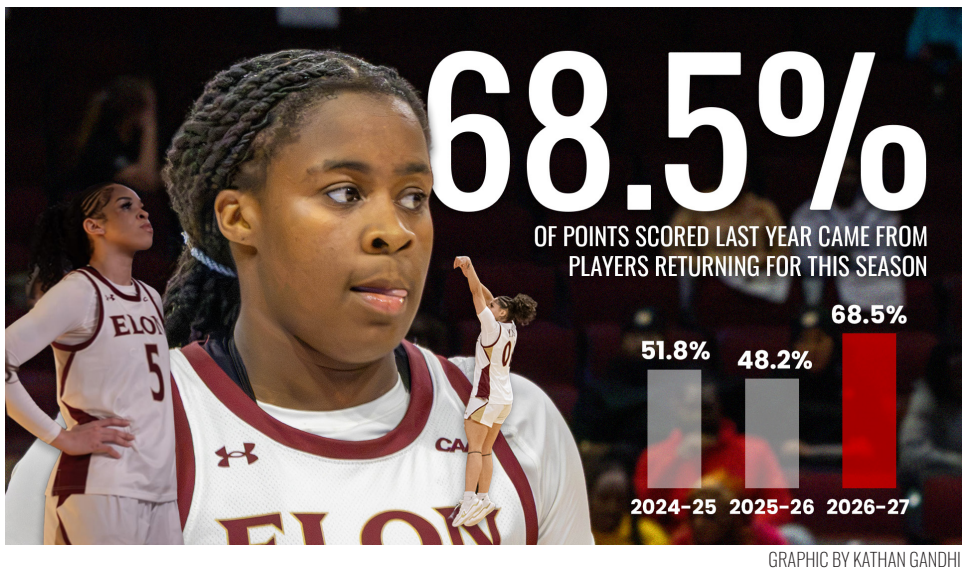
Phoenix building back: Elon women's basketball's conference win percentage over the last 11 seasons

Last season, Elon women's basketball had its first over. 500 conference record since the 2017-18 season, when they won the Coastal Athletic Association.



DATA VISUALIZATION BY KATHAN GANDHI

Data from Elon Athletics.



GRAPHIC BY KATHAN GANDHI

Elon women's basketball retained 68.5% of its total points scored from last season on the 2026-2027 roster — the highest rate for the Phoenix in the last three years. Elon only had one transfer from last year's roster.



GRAPHIC BY KATHAN GANDHI

After losing 11 players from the 2025-2026 roster — five to the transfer portal and six to graduation -- 74% of Elon men's basketball's minutes have come from new players in 2026-2027. 65% come from the seven new transfers on the roster.

Women's basketball looks to soar as season begins

Head coach Charlotte Smith hopes to 'stack days' to huge results

Amayah Rogers
Elon News Network



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophomore guard Ashanti Fox sprints past the University of North Carolina, Pembroke's defense after a turnover by the Braves in Elon's opening game Nov. 2

Basketball is back, and Elon women's basketball has high expectations for this upcoming season.

A fresh new Elon squad is brewing this year, with over half of the team being underclassmen. When the preseason polls rolled in, the Phoenix were predicted to finish second in the Coastal Athletic Association rankings.

Head coach Charlotte Smith believes that her team hasn't focused on the ranking, but focuses on getting better collectively as a team.

"I haven't discussed the poll with the team, because there's a song that says two is not a winner and three nobody remembers, and we want to be number one," Smith said. "It's great that we are preseason pick number two but our goal is number one, and that's all we ever want to accomplish."

Last year, the Phoenix went 16-16, with a 10-8 conference record. It was Elon's first winning conference record since 2017. The Phoenix lost in the second round of the CAA tournament to Drexel University.

The improvement was partially due to the emergence of the freshman guard Ashanti Fox, who led the team in 3-pointers and was second in assists. Fox, now a sophomore, believes that the team's hard work over the offseason will pay dividends.

She exclaimed how it is fun to be around her teammates and how the chemistry is different compared to last season.

"We're a lot younger than last year, so I feel like it's more funny and we are all jokes," Fox said. "Last year we were all cool, but it was business last year. Right now we are all jokes but we're still business."

While Fox said the team has focused on having fun, Smith tells her team the same motto.

"We're very progress driven and focusing on winning the day by stacking days," Smith said. "According to stats on paper, there are going to be teams that we play that are considered more talented than us, but physicality, high energy, a lot of those things can neutralize talent. We have to be willing to do the intangible things that don't show up on the stat sheet like diving for a loose ball."

Elon will face a slew of said teams. This year, Smith has added more Atlantic Coast Conference matchups, like Clemson University, Wake Forest University, and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She said games like this will better prepare her team for conference play.

Fox also believes these games will help them show that they are a force to be reckoned with and will require them to mentally focus.

"Mental preparation is coming in every day, getting the needed treatment," Fox said. "Knowing that we're gonna go up against these big ACC teams is just a lot of preparation."

Fox has made some adjustments to her game to help her team accomplish all their season goals.

"I feel like I'm the point guard to everybody, not just the freshman, but everybody looks up to me, so taking a jump to become more of a leader was really important," Fox said.

Fox isn't the only guard expected to make an impact.

Redshirt sophomore guard Jayda Angel is coming back this season off a torn ACL, and the team believes she will play a key role in how far the Phoenix fly this season. Angel won CAA Rookie of the Year and Sixth Player of the Year in her last healthy season.

But Smith described junior forward La'Nae Corbett as a key force for the Phoenix. Corbett, who led Elon in scoring last year, has received multiple awards for her achievements on the court, including making the CAA Third Team last year.

Smith believes that Corbett will have a huge impact on how far the team goes this year.

"I want to see her lead from a mentality of mental toughness and get over that hurdle of discouragement and frustration," Smith said. "When she is operating at a high level mentally, it elevates everybody else's game."

Corbett's game is centered in the paint. Her post moves were her go-to last season in her first year with the Phoenix.

"I love the post. Born and raised in the post for basketball," Corbett said. "That's literally my sweet spot. Like I've been in there my whole life. I was able to expand my game, get my shot better, but that's my spot."

Smith also believes that the freshmen will play a huge role. Smith said freshman forward Macayla Askew and freshman guard Sydney Smith have been forces in practice, and Smith sees them playing huge minutes for the Phoenix.

"Macayla Askew, who is one of our first years, we're expecting great things from her, since she had a great preseason," Smith said. "Sydney Smith, another first-year, she's going to be our backup point guard, and she's also had a great preseason."

As the season approaches, Smith and her team are excited for an opportunity to play the game that they love, while achieving their goals on the way.

"We need to win the day and be process driven," Smith said. "Ultimately we want to win the CAA championship, but everybody does. It's about the day-to-day grind and being progressive driven by stacking days and getting better each day."

'You're still that girl': Elon's star guard set to return from season-ending injury

Jayda Angel looks to lead team with new perspective, insight

Abigail Hines
Managing Editor of Elonnewsnetwork.com



ENN FILE PHOTO

Redshirt sophomore Jayda Angel is set to return from injury this season after missing almost all of last season.

Life can change in an instant.

Former conference Rookie of the Year Jayda Angel entered her sophomore season with a strong 16-point performance against East Tennessee State University, seemingly picking up where she left off the season before.

That would be the last time during the 2025-26 season that Angel would make it through four quarters on the court. Soon after, a season-ending injury meant she spent the rest of the season on the sidelines with a clipboard and a drive to keep learning, even when she was physically out of the game.

Angel said recovery was as much of a mental battle as it was a physical one.

"Coming into this, you don't really know what to expect, and it's scary," Angel said. "It's frustrating and you just want to be healthy all the way."

Angel said the biggest mental challenge was being patient with the process. She said she had to learn early on that it was not something she could rush.

"It took a long time, and that was the mental part that kind of struck," Angel said. "Just kind of staying in the moment instead of just wishing this and wishing that. I think I just let it all come, and I think that's how everything just flew naturally."

Head coach Charlotte Smith said that processing an injury is the first step, before real recovery can begin.

"The first step was to just get over the mental hurdle of the fact that, 'I'm experiencing something I've never experienced in my life, and how do I emotionally process all of this so that I can get out of the darkness, out of the ashes, to even figure out who I am,'" Smith said.

Building back confidence came not just from the coaching staff, but her teammates, as well.

"I think her teammates have done a really good job of just encouraging her," Smith said. "They were telling Jayda, 'You're still that girl. You're still that girl,' to let her know that, I know you're climbing this mountain that seems insurmountable, but you still have what it takes to be great."

Redshirt fifth-year Kamryn Doty went through a similar injury as Angel and was on the sidelines immediately afterward to talk Angel through it. She was also a support system throughout recovery.

"She just knows that whenever she has questions, she can ask me, or if she just wants to talk, rant," Doty said. "The process is really painful, as well. So whenever she's going through pain and stuff like that, she always comes to me with questions, and I'm just there to just comfort her."

The understanding Doty could provide throughout Angel's recovery, Smith said, was vital.

"It's always good, even to have those who've been through that experience, because that's not just sympathy; that's empathy," Smith said.

Though not physically in the game, Angel was just as involved last year, but in a different way. Smith said Angel took it as an opportunity to learn from observing.

"Seeing the game from a coach's perspective versus a player's perspective, it has increased her wisdom, her knowledge and her understanding of what we're trying to teach," Smith said. "I feel like she's done a good job of teaching others, and she's put on that coaching hat to help some of the younger players."

Angel spent much of last season talking with coaches, studying the game, watching and communicating with the rest of the team what she observed. She said she hopes to take those lessons she learned on the sidelines into her gameplay this year.

"I think that's gonna make everything so much better, just seeing the game and then now being able to just put that out," Angel said. "The determination that I've put in and then also just watching so much film, and I think that's going to make me smarter."

Looking to the future, Smith said they're not putting pressure on Angel to be a star right out the gate. Instead, they're letting her build back that momentum day by day. Angel did not play in the first two games of the season.

Angel said she's coming into this season with deeper insight into the game and a hunger to improve.

North Carolina AI Leadership Council works on statewide AI integration

Members come from government, higher education

Evan Cooper
Elon News Network

Over a year after Gov. Josh Stein signed an executive order to implement artificial intelligence across the North Carolina state government, the state Artificial Intelligence Leadership Council is still working to make sure AI is implemented effectively and ethically.

Thirty-four people serve on the council, including representatives from the state government, higher education and the private sector. Rep. Jake Johnson is a member of the council and serves in the N.C. House of Representatives, where he represents Henderson, McDowell, Polk and Rutherford counties. Johnson is co-chair of the oversight committee on information technology, and said he has enjoyed working with the council on improving AI legislation.

"That is the most beneficial part of the council for me, to make sure that if I am writing a law and I run that by the council, what's so beneficial is to have people from different sectors, whether it's in academia or whether it's in the department itself," Johnson said.

The executive order from Gov. Stein said the purpose of the council was to advise the Governor and state agencies in AI strategy. According to the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's website, the council's three commitments are to protect North Carolina residents from the dangers of AI, prepare residents for AI in school and work, and transform state government with AI to better serve citizens.

As of Nov. 4, 2026, the council has made 25 recommendations to the governor's office and state agencies, including launching a statewide AI literacy initiative and enacting policies to counteract unemployment caused by AI. Most of these recommendations are targeted to be implemented in 2027 and 2028.

Johnson said the legislative side of the council uses the AI Regulatory Reform Act, a bill that was introduced to the State House in April 2025. He said the bill is intended to be a living document, keeping it open for amendments when new developments or concerns with AI arise.

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>
> **JAKE JOHNSON**
> N.C. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MEMBER

"This is not something where we put a set of guidelines in place and say, 'OK, everybody play ball,'" Johnson said. "This is something that every year we are going to have to come back and say, 'Are these rules and guidelines still applicable to the market and to where the technology has evolved from last year?'"

Johnson foresees energy being the next big question the council faces. Duke Energy estimates North Carolina electricity demand to rise between 16% and 60% by 2040, with a majority of the demand coming from data centers and other large users. Johnson said he supports self-generation, producing electricity near where it is being used instead of fully relying on the power grid.

One of the concerns people have regarding AI is the construction of data centers. An Aug. 2026 survey from the Elon Poll found that 53% of respondents would oppose having a data center built in their community, and only 20% said they would support its construction. Despite this, only one of the council's 25 published recommendations focuses on the environmental impacts of AI.

The council's recommendations include encouraging public schools to adopt AI policies and guidelines, connect state agencies with external AI partnership programs, and developing a statewide plan to keep critical AI systems operating during emergencies. The recommendation about environmental impacts suggests using third-party sources to monitor and report on how data centers impact land, water, energy and public health concerns.

Johnson said when he worked with the council on recommendations, he suggested making the recommendations intentionally broad to protect citizens without harming AI developers in the state.

"We would rather take it a little slow because we can always go back and adjust," Johnson said. "But if we go in and overregulate and try to over-prescribe these laws guarding AI, then we may actually backfire and stifle innovation in North Carolina."

Sophie Loeb is a policy analyst with the Center for Progressive Reform, a left-leaning nonprofit research and advocacy agency. Loeb said that while the council is looking at the social impacts of AI, environmental impacts are not given as much focus.

"A lot of times these conversations are happening about the technology itself or the infrastructure, and not talking to both worlds," Loeb said.

Loeb said she wants to see more people on the council who can represent people's concerns with AI.

Sushma Masemore, deputy secretary for environment at the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, is the only member of the council explicitly representing the environmental sector. Two members of the council represent labor concerns, Jennie Bowen with the Rivers East Workforce Development Board and Hannah Drummond with the North Carolina American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. None of these council members were available for an interview.

Stan Ahalt, dean of the School of Data and Information Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, serves on the council and represents education. Ahalt said that when UNC-Chapel Hill worked to integrate AI into the school, they focused on how it can benefit the student experience instead of just being efficient. Ahalt said he tried to bring that mindset to the AI Leadership Council.

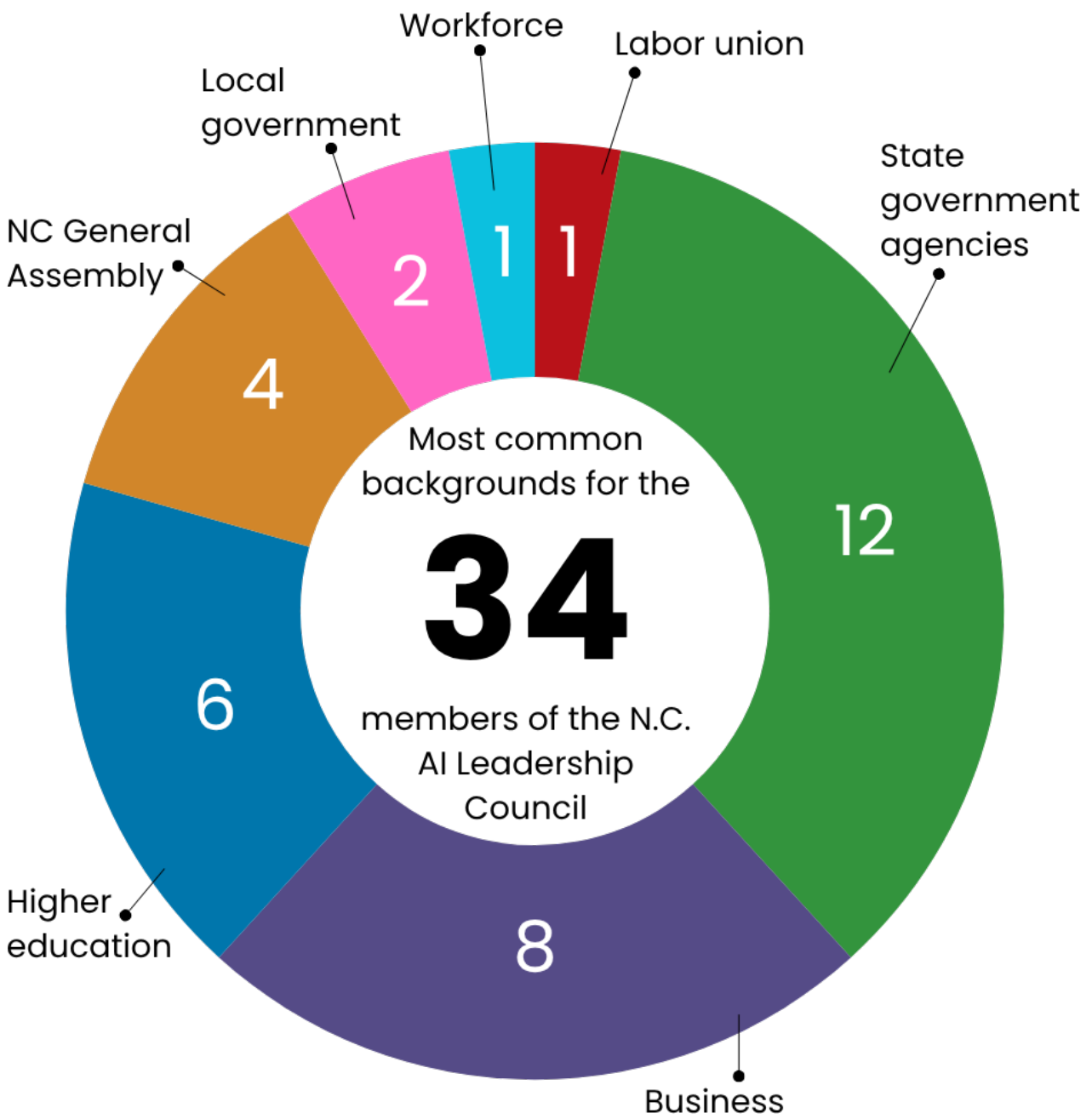
"I was on the technology and infrastructure committee, and we met to talk about the things that we might need in the state of North Carolina in order to utilize AI in constructive ways," Ahalt said.

Ahalt said that he and other representatives from UNC-Chapel Hill — Tommy Sowers and Angel Hsu — brought up to the council that the state should be very deliberate about where data centers are constructed, to make sure they are doing minimal harm to citizens.

Ahalt said that the council has not yet discussed new policy, but members of the council are conscious that this technology must be integrated responsibly and fairly.

Representation of state government organizations on North Carolina AI Leadership Council

A chart looking at what state government organizations are represented on the AI Leadership Council, and how many representatives each organization has.



Data from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology

DATA VISUALIZATION BY AMELIA METZ

New leadership brings fresh plans for Elon Pep Band

Pep band hopes to expand its campus involvement, bring more energy to basketball games

Jordan Poncher
Elon News Network



KATHAN GANDHI | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
The Elon Pep Band performs at Elon men's basketball's home opener against the University of North Carolina Greensboro on Nov. 6 at Schar Center.

The sound of live music, cheers from the sidelines and student involvement all contribute to the atmosphere of Elon's basketball games. As the Elon Pep Band starts a new season under different leadership, the group hopes to build on traditions while also finding new ways to bring the student body together.

M.K. Phillips, adjunct assistant professor of music and assistant athletic band director, joined Elon this semester as the pep band's director. Phillips said the group plays an important role in creating an energetic atmosphere at athletic events. Alongside Interim Director of Bands and assistant professor of music Danny Frye, Phillips hopes to expand the group's involvement beyond basketball games through collaborations with other campus performance groups, including cheer and dance.

"We're hoping to expand that throughout the season to have even more collaboration amongst kinds of music and dance and cheer," Phillips said.

Following an interest meeting, the pep band has about 30 students on its roster. The group has rehearsed several times and performed at the men's and women's basketball season opener. Phillips said they hope to continue growing the ensemble to give students more opportunities to participate and share performance commitments.

In the past, the group has held several rehearsals before the season and shorter rehearsals before each game. Phillips said they hope to maintain the traditions of the program while finding ways to make it even more successful.

"It's just about making sure that we're all spending time together, making sure that we all sound good together," Phillips said.

As Phillips works to establish the group, some logistical details are still being finalized, including funding and student scholarships.

Phillips said those conversations are ongoing following the leadership changes within the music and athletics programs. Phillips said they hope to provide students with more information about funding and scholarships while making sure members have the resources they need in order to participate.

"For me, it's important for the students to know that we're committed to them and committed to supporting what they need to be successful," Phillips said.

Phillips said the pep band can help create a more interactive experience for fans. Rather than playing the same songs throughout every game, the group can respond to what is happening on the court.

For example, the band could play a celebratory tune after a big win or use a familiar tone to react to a moment during the game. Phillips also said that they are working with Frye and Elon's athletic marketing director to incorporate music into themed basketball games, including an upcoming princess night for the women's basketball team.

"I think there's a hunger and a thirst for live entertainment, and live art and human interaction and human experience," Phillips said.

Freshman Caroline Kovatch, a member of Elon's cheer team, said performance groups help build excitement and encourage students to get involved in athletic events.

Kovatch joined the cheer team shortly after the start of the semester after previously cheering for 10 years. She said the team has given her the opportunity to meet new people with similar interests while continuing an activity that has been an important part of her life.

Kovatch said cheerleaders hope to increase morale and encourage school spirit at games, but she also thinks that students do not always recognize the work that goes into campus performance groups.

"People always just associate cheer with pompoms and chants, but there's so many more aspects that go into it that people don't really realize," Kovatch said.

She said cheer and dance can also give students who are not involved in athletics a reason to attend games. Some of her classmates attend specifically to watch her and other members of performance groups.

However, Kovatch said she hopes more students will attend games and actively support the teams and performers.

"It's really boring when you're cheering at a game and there's nobody there, so seeing people actually show up and being involved in the game is very nice to see," Kovatch said.

During the 2025–26 season, Elon men's basketball games drew an average of 1,431 fans per game.

Phillips said the pep band also offers students opportunities to build connections outside the classroom. Through playing music with others, students can develop relationships with people who share similar interests.

"The thing I love about music is community. You have an instant group of friends, you have an instant connection with your passions," Phillips said.

As the season continues, Phillips said the pep band plans to perform at nearly every men's and women's basketball game, excluding games during university breaks.

Students interested in joining the pep band can reach out to Phillips or Frye by email. Phillips said the group welcomes students with a variety of musical interests and play styles, ranging from pop and rock to rap and hip-hop.

Local quilting group designs custom blankets for veterans

Yearly tradition honors locals who served for Veterans Day

Abigail Hines
Managing Editor of Elonnewsnetwork.com

Members of the Alamance Piecemakers Quilt Guild spend weeks at a time working on a new blanket, often scouring the internet for challenging and colorful designs. But every November, the guild devotes their skills to making a specialized quilt for local veterans.

This year, 16 veterans received quilts with designs that reflected their service for Veterans Day. As each quilt was presented, the veteran had the chance to talk about their own service.

Kalani Bennett served in the United States Navy as an Operations Specialist First Class (E-6) from 1987 to 2007. Bennett spoke of her experience being part of the contingency of the first 50 women to integrate on the combatant ships. She received a quilt from her friend, Maxine Leavitt, that had red, white and blue windmill pinwheels on it.

Quilter Sheila Fredette made a quilt for her friend, Jason Frye, who served in the National Guard from 2000 to 2006.

Fredette said she spent a few months designing the quilt and intentionally chose a pattern with stars and stripes. Fredette is married to a veteran and said she put a lot of thought into the design she chose.

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>
> **TONY FORIEST**
> U.S. ARMY VETERAN

"I just made sure that it was precise, and I just put my love into it," Fredette said.

U.S. Army veteran Tony Foriest received his quilt from Doris Williams. Foriest said for him, the recognition meant more than just receiving a blanket.

"It's not so much the quilt itself as the thought behind giving it and recognizing veterans who have given so much to the country," Foriest said.



ABIGAIL HINES | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
United States Navy veteran Kalani Bennett embraces quilter Maxine Leavitt after receiving her blanket at the Alamance Piecemakers Quilt Guild annual Veterans Day event Nov. 4.

The event invited veterans to chat with each other about their own military service, giving them the space to connect with others who understand their stories on another level. Fredette said this allows them to open up more freely, something she's seen help her husband, as well.

"When they come to this event like we've given, it's almost like they can't help it," Fredette said. "They share, it just comes out, and I love seeing it because all of a sudden, they're brothers."

Attendees walked away from the event with deeper insight into each veteran's own experience and what the recognition means years after their service concluded.

While the veterans went home with a new quilt, nearly every attendee heard a story that they'll carry with them through Veterans Day and years after.