

Rookies ready to impress

Pam Richter
Reporter

In the 2007 season, freshman quarterback Scott Riddle put up record-breaking numbers. He had Southern Conference opponents unable to stop his explosive passing performances. To expect a freshman to perform at the same caliber as Riddle would be setting unrealistic expectations. But there are freshmen on the Phoenix squad that have stood out above the rest this preseason.

Freshmen Darrius McQueen and Andrew Straus are both expected to highly contribute to the Elon football program in the 2008 season.

"I would just say that those are two guys that have come in this preseason and made their presence felt," Head Coach Pete Lembo said. "How much of an impact they will make waits to be seen."

McQueen is a 5-foot-7 wide receiver from Tallahassee, Fla. He helped lead his high school, North Florida Christian, to back-to-back state runner-up finishes. There's hope that he can be another viable target for Riddle this season. But adjusting to the college game isn't going to be an easy feat.

"It's a whole different environment from where I come from. It's tough," McQueen said. "It's a lot tougher mentally, but still tough physically."

Lembo echoed McQueen's statement. "You have to learn a new system. Even though most of our freshmen have been here all summer,



Darrius
McQueen

when preseason starts, that playbook is like taking a four credit class," Lembo said. "It's like taking a four credit class in a foreign language that you haven't studied in a while."

Lembo and the Phoenix hope that McQueen can overcome the learning curve quickly in order to contribute to the already explosive offense.

While McQueen hopes to play a pivotal role to Elon's offense, Straus is looking to make an impact defensively. He is a 6-foot-1 defensive back from West Chester, Ohio, who led his high school team's defense. Straus could help an Elon defense that gave up an average of 30 points per game and succumbed to injuries late in the season last year, forcing an unpleasant end to a hopeful season.

"I hope I get in the position to help the team, but I will take whatever role they give me," Straus said.



Andrew
Straus

Lembo said he has been impressed with Straus' play and football knowledge.

"[Straus] has a real savvy for the game and is bright and really coachable. He picks up things quickly," Lembo said.

Both McQueen and Straus have been on campus throughout the summer, taking classes in both summer sessions. Each has learned that college is a whole new environment, even off the football field.

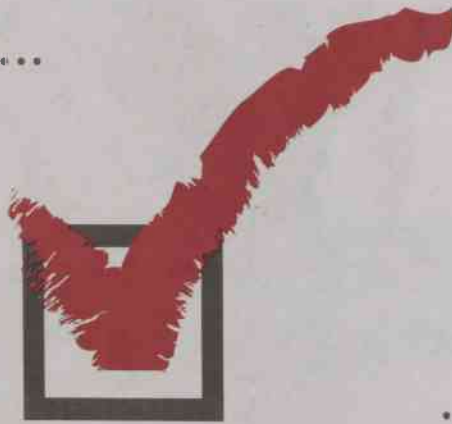
"I'm a long way from home, with no mom or dad to lean back on. It's time to become a man," McQueen said.

As a true freshman, Riddle set Elon and SoCon season records with 346 completions, 508 passing attempts and 3,817 passing yards. Neither Straus nor McQueen will be expected to perform up to that quality, but they are expected to add depth to Elon's offense and defense come the early stages of the 2008 season.

Elon Quick Stats:

- The Phoenix was 7-4 overall, 4-3 SoCon, last season. Elon was tied for first place but fell out of contention in the last two games and finished tied for third in the conference.
- All-American Michael Mayers graduated, leaving a large hole in the Phoenix roster. He holds the SoCon career record for receptions.
- Elon was picked to finish No. 15 in the Football Championships Subdivision by the Coaches Preseason Poll and The Sports Network Poll. USA Today ranked the team No. 8 in their Sports Weekly Preseason Poll.
- In the SoCon, the Phoenix was picked to finish second in the conference standings, ensuring them an automatic birth to FCS postseason.
- Mike McCarthy was hired as the new offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach after the resignation of Warren Ruggiero.
- Daronce Daniels has recovered from season-ending shoulder surgery on Oct. 20 that forced him to miss the last leg of the 2007 season. He has been practicing with the team and the linebacker for Saturday's game.
- Defensive end Tim Happer, a critical player injured late in the season last year, has recovered and was announced as the starting defensive end for Saturday's game against No. 4 University of Richmond.

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