

Elon is where Neal always wanted to call home

Michelle Longo
Sports Editor

In just five years, the lady Phoenix has seen three head coaches, the latest addition to that list being Chris Neal, who came in after the resignation of former coach Chris Webb. Although Neal may have come in like the others, he does not want to go out like they did, or as quickly.

With Neal's hiring, a usually rocky road may have just flattened out for the women's soccer team.

"The overall dedication and drive to the game is 110 percent more than usual," senior goalkeeper Lizz Johnson said. "Team morale and chemistry is there this year, with both the team and the coaches."

A fresh start after a tumultuous season is just what the players are looking for, and Neal is prepared to give it to them.

"I was hired to improve the team's record and competitiveness, to win games and graduate players," Neal said. "I am happy as long as the girls are having a good experience."

Neal comes to Elon after spending the previous seven seasons as an assistant coach at his alma mater, UNC Wilmington. During that stint, UNCW compiled a 70-55-8 record. Before coaching the Seahawks, Neal enjoyed successful campaigns as the head coach of men's soccer at Pfeiffer University and assistant men's coach at Augusta State University.

"As an [assistant] coach, if you are looking to become a head coach you keep your eye on certain jobs and see how things develop. And Elon was always one of those places I had wanted to head coach at," Neal said. "It worked out perfectly."

Joining Neal on the sidelines is assistant coach Stuart Horne, who has been with the program since 2005. When Webb resigned, Horne did not leave Elon, expressing his interest to stay involved with the program and its new coach.

"Many coaches have an issue with not bringing in their own assistants and dealing with any past and present issues," Neal said. "But I did not think there was a better candidate than [Horne] and I was

convinced our styles would be the best thing for the

tonight's first game of the season.



The Elon women's soccer team saw an early exit from the SoCon tournament last season at the hands of UNCG. This season, under new guidance and with what they say is increased motivation and dedication, the Phoenix hopes to climb the SoCon standings for a higher finish.

team."

At Augusta, Neal helped the Jaguars improve from a 7-8 record to a 14-6 slate in just one year. Last season, Elon finished 5-12-2 overall and 3-6-1 SoCon. They were barely able to clinch eighth place, the last spot for a chance at post-season play. The Phoenix lost in the first round of the tournament to UNC Greensboro, ending its rollercoaster season.

A turn-around resembling that at Augusta is what the Phoenix players and coaches are hoping for come

In addition to coaching, Neal has the desire to teach others how to coach. Since 2001, he has served as the state technical director of the National Soccer Coaches Association of America. In this role, he is responsible for organizing advertising and instructing a variety of coaching education courses for hundreds of youth, high school and college coaches.

Under new guidance, offensive power should no longer doom Elon

Michelle Longo
Sports Editor

After an almost miraculous upset victory in the first round of the Southern Conference tournament last season, the women's soccer team is eager to get back on the field and prove itself tonight against in-state rival N.C. State at 7 p.m.

Under guidance from new head coach Chris Neal, the team is feeling rejuvenated and ready to capitalize on the opportunities that lie ahead.

"Everyone has been excited throughout and we are learning a lot as a team on and off the field," senior Kerri Spears said. "Everyone is really ready to take on."

Last season, the Phoenix had a rollercoaster year, never consistent in play or results. Eventually, it was the team's lack of offensive power that

came back to haunt it in the end.

The team finished the 2007 season with a 5-12-2 overall and a 3-6-1 SoCon record, good enough for eighth place in the standings and the last slot for a bid to the league's post-season.

There, they were confronted by a challenge: the first place, undefeated UNC Greensboro Spartans. Elon's defense came alive as they successfully defended the goal, allowing the Spartans only one goal, although they controlled the ball for more than 85 minutes of a 90-minute game.

Despite the bittersweet ending to the season, Elon is a young team and did not lose a single starter going into the 2008 campaign.

Early last season, Elon played three consecutive Atlantic Coastal Conference

teams, including Duke University, Virginia Tech and N.C. State. The Phoenix lost all three games, but the last game against N.C. State proved to be especially heartbreaking.

After a scoreless 90 minutes, the two teams headed into overtime, anxious for a victory and just one goal. Just 56 seconds in, an own goal doomed Elon and the team picked up its third consecutive loss.

Tonight, the invigorated women's team travels to N.C. State for its season opener and something of a redemption game.

"We're not really that nervous," senior Katina Boozer said. "If anything, we are more confident because we have played them before so we know we can win this time."

SoCon play begins on Sept. 26 for the Phoenix when it travels to Birmingham, Ala.,

to take on the newest SoCon member, Samford University.

Elon will greet the school into the tradition-rich conference as the Phoenix and Bulldog collide for Samford's first ever SoCon competition.

League play continues for the rest of the season with 10 bouts until the conference tournament begins. The maroon and gold don't get another shot at UNCG until the regular season finale on Oct. 30.

"We are not trying to conquer the world before N.C. State," Neal said. "We want to be playing the best soccer when SoCon games come and have a legitimate chance to improve our record in the SoCon. There are a lot of things we do well, but some we need to get better as a team and every time we step onto the field we will improve one of them."

Elon tied Radford University 2-2 in their only preseason exhibition game a week ago. The Phoenix was first to score as Molly Calpin smashed a pass from Boozer into the far corner of the net. Boozer, the team's leading scorer last season with seven goals, picked up the assist.

The Highlanders took control in the second half to grab the lead but the Phoenix never gave up, scoring the game-tying goal in the 82nd minute.

"The team displayed a very high level of character and fight," Neal said. "We were very unfortunate to be down and it was an example for the team overcoming adversity very early in the season. To come back from a goal so late in the game, as a coach, it was fantastic to see."

2008 Women's Soccer Game Schedule:

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION
8/29	North Carolina State	Raleigh, N.C.
8/31	Maryland	College Park, Md.
9/3	High Point	HOME
9/7	Old Dominion	Norfolk, Va.
9/12	Garner-Webb	Spartanburg, S.C.
9/14	Winthrop	Spartanburg, S.C.
9/19	Maryland-Baltimore County	HOME
9/29	Samford	Birmingham, Ala.
9/28	Chattanooga	Chattanooga, Tenn.
10/3	College of Charleston	HOME
10/5	The Citadel	HOME
10/10	Appalachian State	Culowhee, N.C.
10/12	Western Carolina	HOME
10/17	Furman	Greenville, S.C.
10/19	Wofford	Spartanburg, S.C.
10/23	Davidson	HOME
10/26	Georgia Southern	HOME
10/30	UNC Greensboro	HOME

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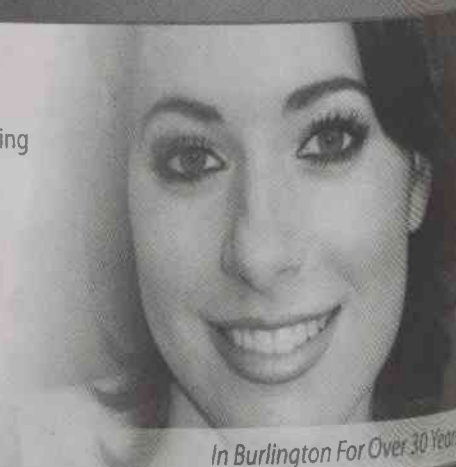
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