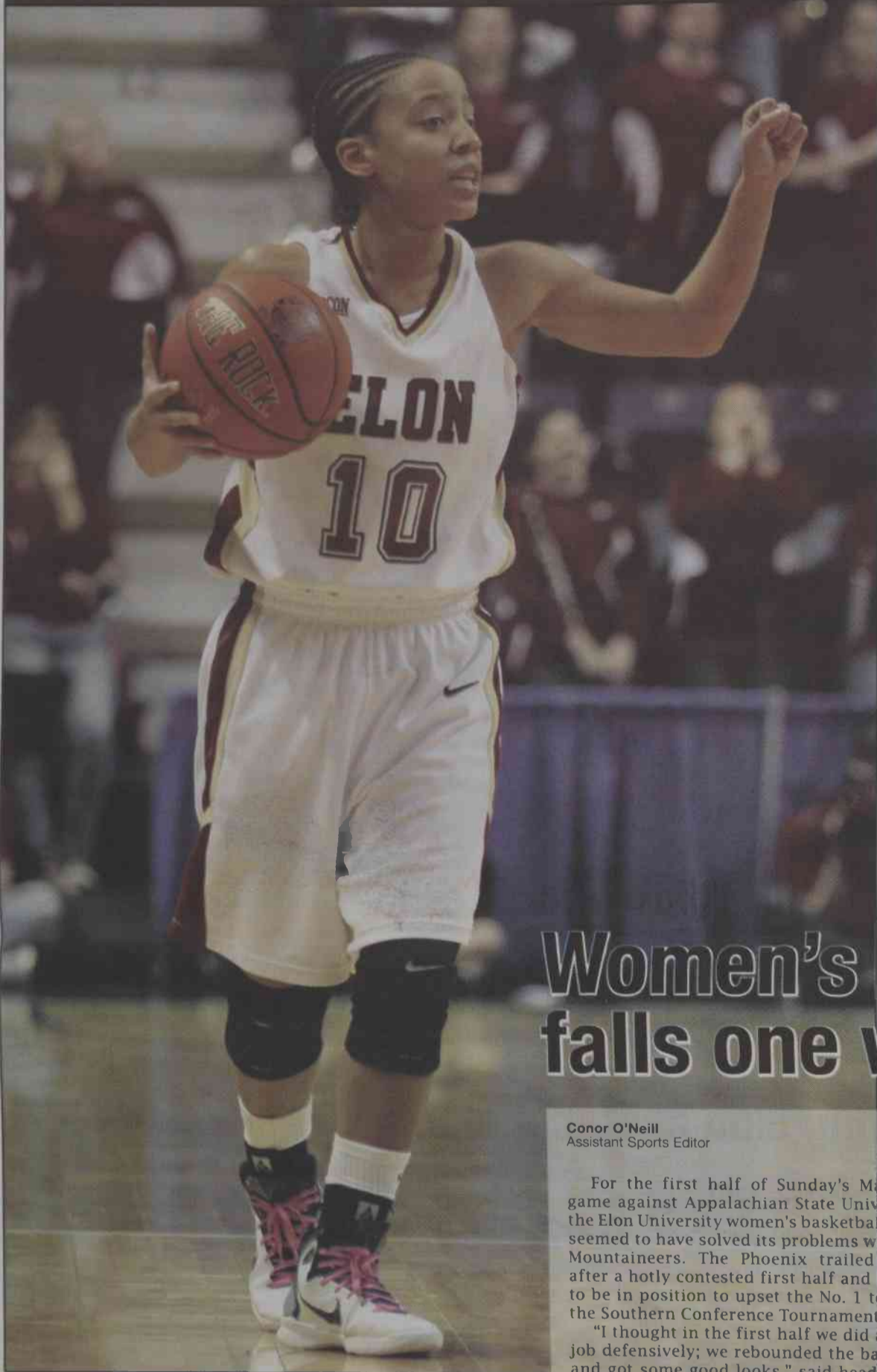


Sports



Women's basketball falls one win shy of 20

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For the first half of Sunday's March 6 game against Appalachian State University, the Elon University women's basketball team seemed to have solved its problems with the Mountaineers. The Phoenix trailed 29-27 after a hotly contested first half and looked to be in position to upset the No. 1 team in the Southern Conference Tournament.

"I thought in the first half we did a great job defensively; we rebounded the ball well and got some good looks," said head coach Karen Barefoot.

But it was a different story in the second half, with the Mountaineers jumping out to a 39-29 lead. Elon brought it back with a 6-0 run, prompting a Mountaineer timeout.

Appalachian State responded with a 15-0 run and cruised to a 72-48 victory, halting the Phoenix's trip to Chattanooga, Tenn., one game shy of the conference final.

"We came out in the second half kind of sluggish, they punched at us and it took us awhile to punch back," said sophomore forward Kelsey Evans. "We let them get some easy shots and our shots just weren't falling."

The Phoenix had trouble controlling Appalachian State's offense, as the Mountaineers recorded assists on 24 of its 31 field goals.

"In the second half, they were moving the ball quicker than we were moving our feet," Barefoot said. "That surprised my team to start the second half, and we weren't the aggressor in the second half that we were in the first half."

Evans led the Phoenix offensively with 13 points and 14 rebounds, recording her tenth double-double on the season. But leading scorer Ali Ford was limited to eight points, all in the first half, and was held scoreless after the 12:28 mark of the opening half.

"Our offense is set up for that and it is nothing I haven't seen before," Ford said. "I just think that in the second half they came

out pushing hard and got us back on our heels."

Regardless of the final result of the tournament, Barefoot said she is thrilled with the way the season has gone.

"I am extremely proud of this team and what they've accomplished all year long is truly amazing," Barefoot said.

It has been a journey for the team this year, coming off a 2009-2010 season that saw the team record a 12-19 overall record and 6-14 in the conference.

This season, the team holds a record of 19-12 with a 12-8 SoCon mark.

"Coming from having six conference wins to having 12 says a lot about our coaching staff," Evans said. "I have never known someone to have more passion for the game (than Barefoot)."

The Phoenix proved to be the second most potent offense in the conference, averaging 67.5 points per game. Only the Mountaineers' average of 73.7 points was higher.

Elon allowed 64.2 points per game, giving the team a scoring differential of 3.4, good enough for third in the conference.

"Just looking back to where I came into this program, it has been a complete jump and leap," Ford said. "We skipped so many steps this year. We went from not having a winning season to almost winning 20 games."

In Barefoot's first season, the 2008-2009 campaign, the team compiled a 5-26 record with a 2-18 SoCon mark.

The Phoenix could have a chance to extend its season with a postseason tournament, but Barefoot would not comment on that possibility after the loss.

"There is definitely a possibility, so we'll just wait and see," Barefoot said.

Whether the Phoenix has a chance to compete against another team this season, Ford said the team has already been through a year of growth.

"This team and this season were special because it was a confidence building year," she said. "I have faith in this team."



Top right: Sophomore guard Ali Ford drives to the hoop against Furman University.
Top left: Junior guard Aiesha Harper had 25 points in Elon's two contests.
Above: Senior guard Julie Taylor looks for a teammate in the opening round.

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