

92-year road trip comes home

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Reporter

The golden statues lining the trophy cases of the Koury Center walls whisper the aura to passersby of championship football teams which once dominated the playing field.

In a time of dynamic change for Elon sports, a move to Division I, a new mascot and finalization of the construction of the state-of-the-art football stadium, it is time to take a look back to the past and remember those times when Elon reigned the world of college football.

In 1909, a team was born. Early into the season faculty members disapproved of the player's frequent absences from class, and by the season's last game the school authorized the abolition of the program. The finale against Bingham Military Academy ended with a victory for the team but the loss of the program.

The program returned to Elon in 1919 and for the next 20 years developed into a gridiron powerhouse. In 1927, Douglas Clyde "Peahead" Walker took over as head coach. Walker amassed six conference championships during his 10 years at Elon. When Walker left in 1937 for the head coaching

job at Wake Forest, Horace Hendrickson took the Fighting Christians under his wing, and carried them to the conference championships. Elon tied Catawba and the two schools shared the title that year.

In 1938, fullback Joe Golomek became the first player in Elon's history named to a national post-season All-American team. Elon relived the championship game from the year before and tied Catawba a second time.

The next 30 years were a roller coaster ride for Elon football. While the team won no major championships during those years, including many great players passed through the program. Tart, a first-team All American in 1963, and quarterback Burgin Beale, who set 23 records from 1965-1968.

In 1973, Coach Red Wilson led the Fighting Christians to the Carolinas Conference Championship for the fourth time in five years. Under Wilson, Elon participated in the NAIA playoffs for the first time in its history in 1973. Elon won its first playoff game against the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse before losing its only game of the season in the semifinals against Abilene Christian College.

In the summer 1999 edition of the Magazine of Elon, John Muir, a member of the '73 team said, "That was a great time to be a part of Elon football. We were so confident. There was a pervasive feeling from week to week that we were going to win."

The 1980s kicked off with back-to-back national championships under head coach Jerry Tolley. "I had a wonderful time as head coach for the Elon football team," said Tolley. "I felt very fortunate to have the talented, hardworking players, who dedicated themselves to the program." Tolley is now the corporate and major gifts officer for Elon.

From 1980-1988 the Fighting Christians experienced nine consecutive winning seasons, the longest run in Elon history.

The 1990s were a time of transition for Elon athletics. In 1999, Elon became a member of Division I (I-AA in football). Two years ago the Fighting Christians mascot was abolished and the Phoenix rose from the flames to represent the athletics teams.

It's hard to predict whether this team will make it into the history books as champions, but it is obvious this day will be highlighted in history as one of the greatest moments in Elon's 92-year road trip.



The Elon football team played Hillsdale in the semifinal game of the NAIA in Dec. 1981. The score was Elon, 41, Hilldale, 13. They went on lose to Pittsburg State in the championship at Burlington Memorial Stadium.

Photos courtesy of Athletics

THE PENDULUM

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The Elon community has cheered for both the Fighting Christians and the Phoenix at Burlington Memorial Stadium. During the 1980s, the team vaulted to the No. one spot in the NAIA.



The 1909 Football team, coached by W.H. "Reddie" Rowe, won four and lost one.

Go Elon!

Hi-de- Hi-de-Hi-de-Hi
Hi-de- Hi-de-hi-de-ho!
Come on let's go

We're going pass thru the middle
We're going around the sides

We're gonna beat this team
We're gonna to tan their hides
What'cha say gang?
Ooooooookay
-Fight 'Em-

Elon cheer from The Fighting Christians: Elon College Athletics Through the Years