

Americans, world unite for Olympic glory in Salt Lake City

Jon Whitkin
Reporter

The Winter Olympic Games have returned again, and they will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah from Feb. 8 and to Feb. 24.

The 2002 games have already gained a negative image after the now infamous bidding scandal, which concerned both the location of the events and the television rights and sponsorship.

However, as always, the Games will provide the competition, determination and desire of the athletes.

Watching an Olympic event for a few hours can serve as an outlet and provide relief for Americans as the fight for war on

terrorism continues.

Ice Skating

All but four of the 14 members of the U.S. figure skating team for next month's Winter Games in Salt Lake City are returning from the 2001 World Championship roster.

The Americans won three medals at last year's world championships and hope to do the same at the Olympics: two medals for the women, one for the men and a barrage of handshakes for the dancers.

Men

The American men have not won an Olympic medal since Paul Wylie's surprise silver in 1992. That should change this time, with three present or former national champions entered.

The best chance belongs to

Todd Eldredge, the reigning world bronze medallist, who's making his third Olympic appearance. Without a quadruple jump however, he has little chance of beating Russia's Evgeny Plushenko or Alexi Yagudin, who should place one and two if they are healthy.

Eldredge is steady enough for third if he can shake the nightmares that plagued him in Nagano and Albertville.

Whether it's Eldredge or not, the third spot is destined for the Americans. Tim Goebel, who lost his U.S. crown to Eldredge last week, has the skills and confidence to beat him if he is on his game. Michael Weiss, who barely made the squad, has two medals in his trophy case, both bronzes.

Women

History says Michelle Kwan will win, as the reigning world champion has dominated the competition 16 of her last 19 competitions. Though Kwan had a difficult Grand Prix season, she's never lost to Russia's Irina Slutskaya at a world championship.

Despite doubts and concerns about her fitness and motivation after dumping coach Frank Carroll just before the season, Kwan looked solid after winning her sixth U.S. title over the weekend of Jan. 19. If Kwan can land her elusive triple-triple combination, the rest of her package should be enough to beat the erratic Slutskaya. If she does not, and Slutskaya has a flawless night, Kwan may have to settle for her second Olympic silver.

The third medal should belong to the Americans, who have won a pair at two of the last three Games. Sarah Hughes won the bronze in Vancouver, but Sasha Cohen outscored her last week, which could squeeze Hughes out of a medal.

Dance

The Americans have not won an Olympic medal in ice dancing since the event was added in 1976. Naomi Lang and Peter Tchernyshev have made the top 10 at the last three world championships, but they missed the Grand Prix season because Tchernyshev suffered shin splints.

Eighth place would be a reasonable showing for the U.S.

The Olympic preview is a two article series. This is part one.

Men's basketball squad undefeated at home against Big South competition

Colin Donohue
Sports Editor

The Phoenix probably forgot the familiarity of their home court after a long December, which saw them pick up one win in five games. Yet, they returned in good form reeling off three consecutive Big South conference games at the Nest.

"I must not know what I'm thinking," head coach Mark Simons said of Elon's tough out of conference schedule. "But it helps us prepare."

The Phoenix men's basketball team (7-9, 3-1) closed out the figurative first half of their season against three tough out of conference foes. Elon traveled to Clemson University Dec. 15 to face their third ACC opponent of the year.

They played tough, only trailing the Tigers by one point at the half, 45-44. However, Clemson, led by Jamar Knight's game-high 23 points would pull away for a hard-fought 88-78 win. Junior guard Ross Simms poured in 21 points with five assists to lead the Phoenix.

Elon made the trip to Birmingham-Southern University Dec. 18 to face a Panther team that will be added to the Big South next season. Again,

the Phoenix kept the game close, but the Panthers, who had five players score in double digits, put it away 65-58. Redshirt freshman Gary Marsh led all scorers with 16. The Panthers were paced by T.R. Reed's 12 points and 11 rebounds.

The men completed out of conference play with a match-up against Arkansas Dec. 29. The Phoenix struggled offensively all game, and lost in horrific fashion, 96-52. Freshman guard Sean Newton was Elon's lone bright spot scoring 10 points and going 2-for-4 from beyond the arc.

A dejected Elon team faced a tough conference opener after such a hard loss. Radford, last season's Big South regular season champions, traveled to the Nest Jan. 2 hoping to keep Elon's losing streak alive.

The Phoenix responded in resilient form, playing the Highlanders close all game. The difference in the ball game was the Phoenix's ability to press full court. They forced Radford into 24 turnovers, and eventually took the ball game 61-58.

Radford's seven-foot center Andrey Savtchenko, the projected Big South player of the year, scored 13 points to match his 13 boards. Elon's preseason All-Big South team member senior guard Brendon

Rowell led Elon with 13 points.

The Buccaneers came to Elon having dropped one game in the conference already. The first half was tight, as Elon nursed a 29-28 lead at the half. Elon stepped up their effort in the second half and won 75-69, despite a Charleston Southern University 22-13 run to close the game.

Rowell finished the game with 22, but the game MVP honors belonged to junior forward Shamar Johnson, who racked up career highs in scoring (16 points) and rebounds (11).

Elon closed out their three-game homestand against Coastal Carolina University, taking the game rather easily 91-80. Again Rowell led Elon with 24 points. Simms added 19, and Marsh followed with 18 of his own. The Phoenix shot 51 percent from the field in their win.

Following the game, Simons was pleased at the three game streak. "There's so much parity in the league," he said. "It's tough to win on the road. The teams on top win at home and split on the road."

Elon dropped its first conference game at Winthrop University. The game marked Winthrop's 23rd consecutive conference win, which is the nation's second longest trailing only Utah. Elon seemed lost offensively



Tim Rosner / Photographer
Brendon Rowell with emphatic dunk in win over Chanticleers.

(36 percent from the field, 22 percent from three-point land) and their press proved ineffectual. Winthrop won 76-64 marking their first conference win. Rowell dumped in 22, and senior guard David Hall had 17 points.

"We were playing their type of game," Rowell said after the loss. "We weren't able to run, and they play like Champions."

Staying on the road, the Phoenix made the trip to the University of North Carolina at Asheville to face

the Big South's first place team. Elon would continue their struggles away from home, dropping the contest 76-64. Rowell's 22 points moved him into the top ten on Elon's all-time scoring list.

The Bulldogs received career-highs in points from Bryan McCullough (17) and Michael Harper (15).

A week later, Elon took their 3-2 conference mark back home to face a 3-15 Liberty University squad. The Flames played a hotly contested first half, nursing a two point lead into halftime.

The Phoenix came out in the second half reinvigorated. They outscored Liberty 41-17 in the final frame to win the game 75-53. The win broke an ugly 0-10 Phoenix record when trailing at the half.

Rowell had 18, and Johnson chipped in with 13 points and seven rebounds.

The Phoenix now stand at 8-10 overall and 4-2 in the conference. Simons thinks the team's chemistry has been the key.

"We're more together as a team," he said. "I believe we truly get along, and we really compete against each other in practice. That's the biggest difference."