

Third place is the new first place

Adam Lawson
Reporter

Elon's women's cross-country team aims to do something that has not been done in the last decade: finish in the top three at the Southern Conference Championships.

Last season left a bitter taste when the team finished in fifth place, missing the opportunity to race at the NCAA nationals. Individually, the team was led by then-sophomore Caitlin Beeler, the 2006 SoCon Freshman of the Year, who finished fourth overall in the field.

The season was capped off by consistent fourth and fifth place finishes, including a fifth place finish out of 44 teams at the Disney Invitational, finishing ahead of SoCon foes The Citadel and Wofford. Beeler boasted an individual fifth place finish as well.

The Phoenix stayed on track a week later, finishing fourth out of 18 teams at the Blue Ridge Mountain Open. With third place in reach, the team just could not finish it, something that plagued them the whole season.

But with a new season comes a new coach and with a new coach comes new expectations, new beginnings and new opportunities.

"I have to hold our team to a high



FILE PHOTO

This year's women's cross country team aims to best its fifth place finish in the Southern Conference Championships by finishing in the top three this year.

standard," Head Coach Christine Engel said. "It is my job to make sure they show a commitment to the team. And it is their job to make sure they live up to their responsibilities as members of the Elon cross country team."

Many of the squad's runners and most of its key players are returning, including junior Cait Beeler, the 2006 SoCon Freshman of the Year. Last season, Beeler took the top spot on the phoenix squad with then-freshman

Emily Fournier close on her heels. The in-house competition will still be boiling as Beeler and Fournier look to lead the great depth of this year's team.

Another thing that hasn't changed much over the course of a summer is the schedule. Just as last season, the team will race their season opener at 5 p.m. today at the Wake Forest Relays. Last season, the women finished fourth out of four teams at this meet, which was the season-opener as well. The Demon Deacons were able to grab first place as the Phoenix narrowly missed a third place finish.

"We are looking to put up a stronger front and a much more united team," Captain Colleen McCarthy said. "We are going to be much more competitive."

Competing in three more races in less than a month, the women travel to Boone for the Blue Ridge Open once again. Usually racing very well in the mountains, the meet will be the team's final run before the SoCon Championships begin two weeks later, where the Phoenix hopes to break the curse of third place.

"With our great incoming freshman class and returnees, our team is looking to move up in the conference place-wise," senior Katie White said. "We're definitely aiming for a top three finish this year."

Men's and Women's Cross Country



8/29 - 5 p.m.
Wake Forest Relays
Winston-Salem, N.C.

9/6 - 8 a.m.
Eye Opener Invitational
Spartanburg, S.C.

9/2 - 9 a.m.
Asics/Winthrop Invitational
Rock Hill, S.C.

10/4 - 9 a.m.
Hagan Stone Classic
Greensboro, N.C.

10/17 - 9 a.m.
Blue Ridge Open
Boone, N.C.

11/1 - 9 a.m.
Southern Conference
Championship
Spartanburg, S.C.

11/8 - 9 a.m.
Pack Invitational
Raleigh, N.C.

11/15 - 9 a.m.
NCAA Regional
Championships
Tanglewood, N.C.

11/24 - 11 a.m.
NCAA Championships
Terre Haute, Ind.

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visit www.elonphoenix.com

Maturity plays key role in men's cross country success at season's start

Adam Lawson
Reporter

After a sixth place finish in last year's Southern Conference Championships, the Elon Phoenix men's cross country team is aiming for a better, more consistent squad under new Head Coach Christine Engel.

One of the weaknesses of the 2007 squad was their inconsistency throughout the season. While they managed to have some impressive meets, such as their second place finish in the Catamount Classic and their fourth place finish at the Disney Classic, the Phoenix struggled in others, finishing as low as 32nd in one meet. The biggest disappointment came at the Southern Conference Championships when Elon finished sixth.

"Last year we didn't race well together," Captain Rick Myers said. "We

are working on racing well together in practice so hopefully that will carry over to some of the meets."

Fall 2008 is an opportunity for the Phoenix to show that this is a new, improved and rejuvenated team. Engel said she promises improvement in the team by way of increased level of intensity and making the team more disciplined.

Elon's men's team is suffering from the loss of brothers Justin and Eric Garren, both of whom graduated in 2008. Stepping in for the departed players and leading the squad this season will be senior co-captains Myers and Eric Lewandowski.

Myers hopes to better his 27th place individual finish at the conference championships last year, while simultaneously serving as one of the team's leaders on and off the course.

"It means a lot to me to be captain in my last year," Myers said. "I want

to welcome the new freshmen into collegiate running and hopefully get them accustomed to being here."

Lewandowski had the team's best finish at SoCon last year, finishing the race in a time of 26:31.88, good enough for 22nd. Consistently finishing within the top five, Lewandowski is a bright spot for Elon.

All in all, maturity will play a role in how the team performs throughout the season. Being a team filled with veterans, the runners already know what is needed of them and what they need to bring to the team and the meets.

"Our team is full of people who simply love running," Myers said. "They love running for what it is and have the right attitude. They understand it is about teamwork and each other. They're bringing the love aspect to running."

Cross country coach begins career at Elon

Adam Lawson
Reporter

Christine Engel is a runner. She runs because of the feeling. She runs because it's fun. But most of all, she runs because she loves it. Now, she has a different kind of running to do: Running the men's and women's cross country program at Elon.



Christine Engel

After the resignation of Jackie Sgambati from her alma mater in May 2008, the process began to find Elon a new head coach. In early July, Engel was the one running through the door as head cross country coach and she has not slowed down since.

Engel comes to Elon after spending one year as the assistant cross country and track and field coach at Columbia University in New York City and Elon will mark her first head coaching gig.

As an accomplished athlete, Engel dons numerous accolades, accomplishments she hopes will carry over in her lessons to the Phoenix. After completing a solid career at Clemson University, one that earned her 12 varsity letters and two All-ACC selections, Engel has coached at a variety of places, and has been successful at each spot.

"I definitely feel part of the reason for my success is the fact that I can draw from my own athletic experiences and relate to my runners," Engel said. "I have also been blessed with great coaches in my lifetime, and I have taken some of what I learned from those coaches and used that to better the teams that I have coached."

After graduating from Clemson, Engel was the head coach of both track and cross country for West Morris Senior High School in New Jersey. While there, she earned the 2003 Cross Country Coach of the Year Award by the Newark Star Ledger and coached her runners to a total of four all-state teams and 34 all-conference nominations.

Engel also coached the Impala Racing Team, one of the elite club teams for women's running, where she helped six athletes qualify for the 2008

Olympic trials in the marathon.

Prior to her stint at Columbia, Engel spent three seasons holding the same position at the University of San Francisco. While there, Engel guided both teams to their most successful seasons in program history.

As for the upcoming season, Engel looks forward to the schedule that awaits the Phoenix runners, saying that the variety of meets and courses will help the team when it comes time to compete in the SoCon Championships.

"I feel that both teams can improve on their finishes last season," Engel said. "I think the Southern Conference is a tough conference, with a lot of depth, but I also believe that I can help our runners improve upon our finishes in last year's Southern Conference Championships."

Those runners that she has so much confidence in have equally the same amount of confidence in their new coach.

"She is not someone that is going to take anything from us," Captain Colleen McCarthy said. "She has a positive attitude and is very organized. She is concerned with our health and our overall well-being, which is most important."