

Men's soccer holds on to perfect record, moves closer to the NCAA tournament

Parker Brown
Reporter

After tearing through the Southern Conference's regular season with a perfect 7-0 record, the Elon men's soccer team built on that success in the postseason, knocking off the No. 8 seeded Wofford Terriers Saturday night 3-0 at Rudd Field.

Elon (10-8-1) earned the No. 1 seed and home-field advantage for the first round by winning the regular season conference championship.

That advantage was in full effect Saturday as a Rudd Field record of 1,107 fans filled the bleachers and lined the fences to support the team.

"[The fan support] was great," sophomore goalkeeper Clint Irwin said. "We had a lot of fans out here tonight, and they were rowdy, especially after Homecoming, so it was good to see them out there supporting the team. It certainly helps us when we are playing in front of a big crowd. Everyone feeds off of it and runs that little bit harder because of it."

The Phoenix did not disappoint. Junior forward Erfan Imeni got the fans going early with a quick goal less than two minutes into the game.

Junior mid-fielder Justin Wyatt sent a corner kick across the box to fellow junior Steven Kinney who headed it down to Imeni for the finish and a 1-0 lead.

Wyatt picked up another assist on a give and go with senior forward Aaron Parker who ripped a shot across the goal to push the lead to 2-0 at the midway point of the first half.

In the 79th minute, Kinney played a long ball to junior mid-fielder Daniel Street who crossed the ball to the foot

of a streaking Wyatt for the ensurance goal.

Irwin came up with a big save on a Wofford penalty, and the defense held the Terriers to just four shots on goal to secure the seventh shut out of the year for the Phoenix.

Still, the most important thing to head coach Darren Powell and the team was simply moving one step closer to their ultimate goal.

"We would like to go to the NCAA [tournament]," Powell said. "We know that you've got to win three games in the Conference tournament at the end of the year and it's one at a time, a nice cliché, but that's what the boys want to do, and they are very hungry for that."

The team has not been able to break through and win the conference tournament in the almost 10 years the program has been in Division I.

But the team is confident after securing its first regular-season SoCon championship that it can break through this year.

While the team is proud of its regular-season success, there is no question it remains hungry for the postseason.

"I've got that desire to get to the NCAA tournament," Wyatt said. "It's something none of us have ever experienced. We want the seniors to experience that. There's just so much motivation there I can't even explain it."

Wyatt, who was named SoCon Player of the Year, leads a host of Phoenix players who were selected to the All-Conference teams.

Powell was also honored with his second Conference Coach of the Year award in four seasons at the helm.

Powell said he is proud of the accolades he and the team have been able to collect this season, but he



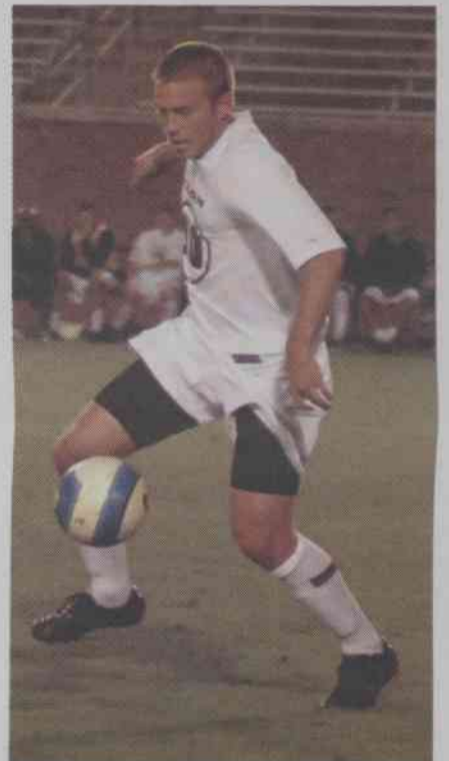
FILE PHOTO
Standout freshman, James Carroll (8) was selected to the 2008 All-SoCon Freshmen team last week. Carroll has played in every game except one for the Phoenix and tallied 3 points.

is also quick to point out that the hardware the team really wants are championships.

"Those honors are all good at the end of the year when you reflect back," Powell said. "Right now we are still playing, and we want to continue to still play and that is our focus right now."

Elon continues its quest for the elusive conference tournament crown, and an automatic berth in the NCAA tournament this weekend, at Davidson College.

The Phoenix will take on the No. 5 seeded College of Charleston Cougars, who it defeated 1-0 in the regular season, on Friday night for a spot in the finals against either Georgia Southern or UNC Greensboro on Sunday.



FILE PHOTO
ABOVE: Sophomore midfielder Hunter Miller has played in 12 games for the Phoenix in the 2008 campaign. He was red-shirted his freshman year for his potential talent and coaches say with more consistency he will have another solid year and become a forceful player for Elon.
BELOW: Daniel Street, a junior midfielder, drives the ball down the field in an earlier contest this season. Street has played in 11 games this season, five in which he started. He tallied 3 assists, 3 points and took a total of 12 shots. Street picked up an assist against Wofford, playing the ball to Justin Wyatt who connected for his 12 goal of the year and the third and final goal of the SoCon tournament semi-final victory.

Other SoCon Tournament Matchups:

Match 1:
#8 Wofford at #1 Elon
Elon, 3-0

Match 2:
#5 College of Charleston at #4 Appalachian State CofC, 3-2 (OT)

Match 3:
#7 UNC Greensboro at #2 Furman
UNCG, 2-1

Match 4:
#6 Davidson at #3 Georgia Southern
GSU, 2-1



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