

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE SOCON

Football

Appalachian State defeated South Carolina State 20-13 in the first round of the FCS playoffs Nov. 23. The Mountaineers, the fifth seed overall, will advance to the national quarterfinals where it will face No. 4 University of Richmond for the third-straight season Saturday.

Mountaineers quarterback Armanti Edwards completed 19 of 30 passes and threw for three interceptions and 218 yards. He ran for minus-one rushing yard, which was his fewest in his 47 career starts.

The Mountaineers' Dominique McDuffie's 50-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the fourth quarter solidified the victory for the team.

This is the Mountaineers 14th victory in its last postseason games. Last season, Richmond won the FCS Championship and the Mountaineers won the year before.

With the Elon loss, the Mountaineers are the only SoCon team remaining in the FCS playoffs.

Volleyball

The College of Charleston

volleyball team defeated Furman 3-0 to win the 2009 Southern Conference Volleyball Championship. With the victory, Charleston will advance to the NCAA tournament.

It will play its first-round game Thursday against No. 15 University of Florida. Charleston is 18-12 so far this season, while the Gators are 23-5 overall.

It is the sixth appearance for Charleston in program history. The two teams met in the first round of the 2007 tournament with the Gators winning 3-0.

Women's basketball

SoCon play for the 2009-10 women's basketball season opened earlier last month as Western Carolina defeated Wofford College 71-65.

For most of the other teams, SoCon play begins at 7 p.m. tonight as Appalachian State hosts Georgia Southern.

Even though Western Carolina is the only team to notch a conference win, it is 1-5 overall. Samford is 5-1 overall and College of Charleston is 4-2 overall.

Davidson College is currently winless with a 0-6 record.

UT Chattanooga was selected to win the SoCon title. The Mocs are seeking their 11 consecutive regular season title. Samford was picked to finish second, only eight points behind the Mocs.

Men's basketball

The men's SoCon basketball season will begin tonight at 7:30 p.m. as Western Carolina hosts Wofford College. The SoCon season will begin for several other teams Thursday.

Western Carolina currently sits on top of the North Division with a 5-1 overall record, while Furman is 4-1 overall and leads the South Division.

Western Carolina was picked to finish first in the North Division in SoCon preseason poll and the College of Charleston was voted to finish first in the South Division.

UT Chattanooga, which won last season's tournament and earned an automatic birth to the NCAA tournament, was picked to finish fourth in the North Division.

Davidson, which won the regular season title, is picked to finish second in the South Division.

VIEW FROM THE STANDS:
Hats off to
the Phoenix

It's an often overused and overstated quote from a defeated coach: "Our players gave tremendous effort." Upon hearing this, most sports fans know their team lost the game and the coach just wants to credit his players with not giving up.

But in the case of Elon head coach Pete Lembo, in a statement released about Saturday's playoff loss to Richmond, "Our players gave tremendous effort" is a drastic understatement.

A lot of defenses across the country, not just in the Football Championship Subdivision but all of college football, would have extraordinary trouble playing a game in which its leading tackler was hurt on the second play from scrimmage. When that happened to the Phoenix defense as sophomore linebacker Josh Jones was driven off the field, the Phoenix defense could have broken before the offense had taken the field.

But the Phoenix rallied and brought new meaning to the bend-don't-break strategy.

Although the unit allowed the Spiders to gain 400 net offensive yards, it only surrendered 16 points. Seventy four of those yards came on one play, a quarterback bootleg run by Richmond senior Eric Ward.

After Elon freshman kicker Adam Shreiner missed wide right on a 27-yard field goal with 90 seconds remaining to tie the game, a few fans headed to the exits. Others who stayed in their seats put on coats, hats and were ready for the clock to hit zero so they could try to beat the dreaded game traffic.

There was just one problem — the Phoenix defense was not ready to call it a day, and after stuffing three Spider runs they got the ball back to the Phoenix offense with 25 seconds to go. It was as if the defense said to Richmond, try defending National Champions, "No, you're going to have to do more to win this game."

While 25 seconds at the end of a basketball game can seem like an eternity, 25 seconds at the end of a football game for an offense with no timeouts left is not much time.

But junior quarterback Scott Riddle, who played with more heart and determination than I have ever seen from a quarterback, commanded one last Phoenix drive down to the Spiders' 30-yard line. As Shreiner's 48-yard field goal attempt fell short, so did the Phoenix's chance of earning a rematch with Appalachian State University on Saturday.

And who's to say players are the only people at football games to show heart? On Saturday, there were no Elon students socializing at the football game, as is common at Rhodes Stadium. Nobody left at halftime because there was something more important to do on a Saturday afternoon. The Phoenix faithful stood behind the team and did their best to neutralize any home-field advantage for the Spiders.

Forget the 74-yard touchdown run by a quarterback. Forget the 27 net rushing yards for the Phoenix. Forget the two missed field goals with less than two minutes left in the game. Forget settling for six points on three trips into the red zone. Forget two plays before the first field goal attempt in which Phoenix receivers were inches from scoring touchdowns.

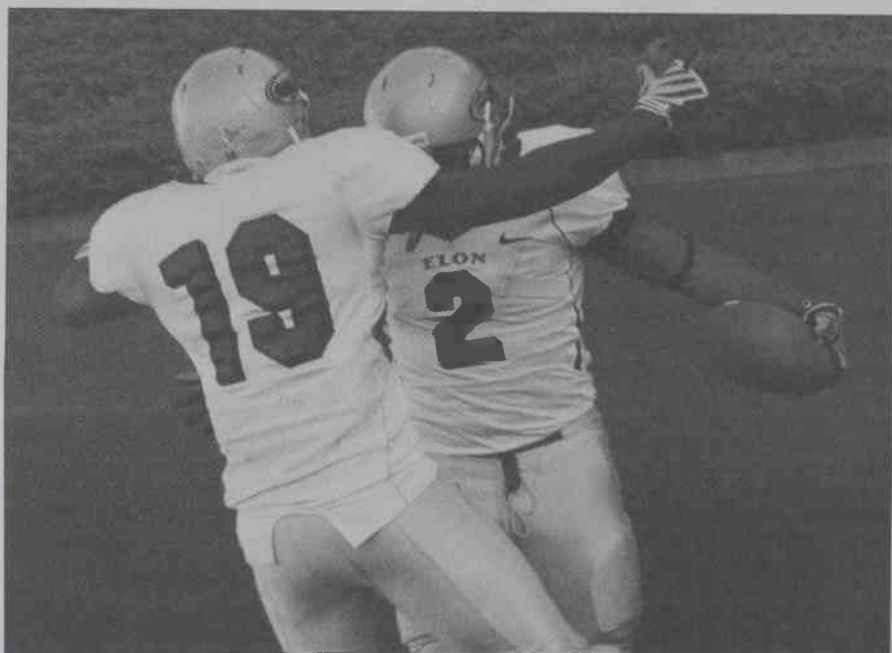
What should be remembered about the biggest football game in Phoenix history is how hard the players fought to the final whistle. The truly inspiring play of the defense and Riddle's last-minute heroics should be beacons of what is to come for a rising Phoenix program.

It should be remembered that senior wide receiver Terrell Hudgins had another huge game for the Phoenix with 12 catches for 167 yards and a touchdown.

Most importantly, it should be remembered how hard this team worked throughout the season and how much heart it showed in a gut-wrenching loss.



Conor O'Neill
Columnist



Senior wide receiver Terrell Hudgins (left) hugs teammate junior running back Brandon Newsome after completing a play against Western Carolina Nov. 7. Elon won 42-17.

SPORTS
THIS WEEK

DEC. 3 – DEC. 7

Thursday

Men's basketball @
Samford – 8:30 p.m.

Indoor track (Liberty
Kick-Off) – All Day

Saturday

Men's basketball @
Chattanooga –
7:30 p.m.

Women's basketball
@ Georgia Southern –
3:00 p.m.

Monday

Women's basketball @
College of Charleston
– 7:00 p.m.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Hudgins named finalist for Walter Payton Award

Elon senior wide receiver Terrell Hudgins was named as one of three finalists for the 2009 Walter Payton Award. Each year the award is given to the top offensive player in the FCS.

The other two finalists are senior quarterback Armanti Edwards, from Appalachian State University, and Deji Karim of Southern Illinois. Edwards won the award last season.

Hudgins has finished in the top-15 in the award voting the past two seasons. In 2007 he became the first finalist in Elon history.

The three finalists will find out the winner of the award at a banquet on Dec. 17 in Chattanooga, Tenn before the FCS national championship game.

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Football

Nov. 21

Elon 27

Samford 7

Nov. 28

Elon 13

Richmond 16

Men's basketball

Nov. 20

Fairleigh

Dickinson-Florham 68

Elon 102

Nov. 23

Elon 46

Hofstra 70

Nov. 24

Elon 65

Yale 69

Nov. 29

UNC Wilmington 86

Elon 56

Women's basketball

Nov. 20

St. Andrews 27

Elon 104

Nov. 28

Elon 46

Virginia Tech 82

ATHLETIC RESULTS NOV. 18 – NOV. 30