

COACHING HIS OWN TEAM



LINDSAY FENDT | Photo Editor
 ABOVE: (From left to right) Seniors running back Brandon Newsome, offensive linemen Corey O'Shea and Mark Hoffer, defensive linemen Brandon Ward and David Hunt, offensive lineman John Rubertone and linebacker Travis Greene and head coach Pete Lembo are the only remaining people from Lembo's first round of recruiting.
 RIGHT: (From left to right) Newsome, Greene, O'Shea, Hoffer, Hunt, Ward and Rubertone huddle around Lembo.

Sam Calvert
 Sports Editor

FROM 2002 TO 2005, THE ELON UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM SECURED 12 WINS IN FOUR SEASONS. IN THE FOLLOWING FOUR SEASONS,

under new head coach Pete Lembo, the team more than doubled its win number to 29.

In Lembo's first season, in 2006, the Phoenix ended the year with five wins. With each consecutive year, the team has increased its victories, and by the end of last season, Elon finished with nine wins — the most wins in 10 years.

"(This program) has come a long way," senior offensive lineman John Rubertone said. "Winning wasn't a ritual. He came in and brought a winning attitude."

Lembo joined the Elon coaching staff when he was hired as the head coach in December 2005. He immediately jumped into recruiting, and he said he spoke with two different groups: those he had a month to recruit and those he had an entire year to recruit.

"It was sort of a leap of faith for them," Lembo said. "All they saw was a program that struggled a great deal. The senior class really believed in us as a staff and in the institution's commitment to this program."

Seven players from the one-month group redshirted during their freshman year, and these seniors represent the last remaining piece of

Lembo's first months at Elon.

Offensive linemen Mark Hoffer, Corey O'Shea and Rubertone, linebacker Travis Greene, defensive linemen David Hunt and Brandon Ward and running back Brandon Newsome were among those who chose to jump into a whole new system and have had the opportunity to watch it grow into the program it is today.

With these seniors, the team has reached a point where, for the first time, every athlete playing under Lembo's staff was recruited by Lembo's staff.

"When he first came in, he wanted everyone to follow the system, to do things the Elon way," Newsome said.

At the time, a majority of the players were not one of his recruits, and to them, Lembo's system was foreign. With each different coach comes a different way of doing things day-to-day, and Lembo's arrival was no exception.

Despite the change, Lembo said he still thought he coached and treated everyone the same.

"I embraced the guys we had here, but I also held them accountable," Lembo said. "There were a few that

couldn't live up to the standards, but they weeded themselves out."

After the initial paring down, Lembo and Newsome said things went smoothly, but there is an advantage to having continuity in the system under which the players were recruited.

"There haven't been problems, but there's definitely a benefit to having everyone know what you are doing everyday and how things work," Newsome said. "It goes smoother."

An understanding of expectations, Lembo said, is another reason things run better now that he is solely coaching his own recruits.

"It's nice to have a certain amount of cohesiveness and chemistry, knowing they're each together with the same expectations," Lembo said. "It helps

the day-to-day flow."

As those seven players redshirted in 2006 enter their final season with the Phoenix, Lembo will have the chance to see the last of that first recruiting class reach the concluding stages of its Elon career.

And now that he has had a chance to coach his first group of recruits from freshmen to seniors, Lembo can finally reap the benefits of watching his players develop.

"It's incredibly rewarding to be able to see a player grow and develop, not only as a person, but also as a player," he said. "I have seen so many success stories of players who have bought into the program and represented this institution well and all that it stands for."



MEET THE COACH: PETE LEMBO

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Spectators see him walking up and down the sidelines, looking on as the Elon University football team takes on its opponent. He's the man beneath the headset, talking to

coaches and players alike.

He's Pete Lembo, and he's the head coach of the Elon football team. And while those in the stands may see his coaching style from afar, only his players hear the words coming from his mouth.

"Water up and get up," senior quarterback Scott Riddle said. "That's a new one this year."

Lembo repeated the saying quite often throughout the preseason whenever players would take a water break, Riddle said. Players would kneel down at the water coolers and hear that phrase spurt from Lembo's lips — a reminder that practice was yet to be through.

But every coach has a catchphrase.

What makes Lembo unique is his approach to the art of coaching, senior running back Brandon Newsome said.

"He's a business man connoisseur," Newsome said. "He's organized down to a tee. He's like a CEO."

Newsome said Lembo has everything scheduled and planned, with times set for everything.

"He's a nerd when it comes to football," Riddle said.

During the preseason, different players would dress up or do impersonations of Lembo, emphasizing his passion for the game, Riddle said. But the coach demonstrates his sense of humor,

too, always able to laugh at himself.

Part of that passion comes in his knowledge of the game, Riddle said. "He's a really smart guy," Riddle said. "He can teach any position on the field."

Because of that, he is able to work with every player, Riddle said, and his coaching style can be as intense as his love and knowledge of football. Through it, he shows how much he's devoted not only to the game, but also to the players themselves.

"He can get in your face when you're slacking off, but he understands the time and places to do so," Riddle said. "He takes care of his players."