

Elon starts SoCon schedule against perennial power Georgia Southern

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Senior Reporter

The first season is over, according to football head coach Pete Lembo.

While the Elon University football team has only played three games, the team is getting ready for what Lembo describes as the "second season" — the beginning of Southern Conference play — with a tilt against No. 24 Georgia Southern University at 6 p.m. Saturday in Statesboro, Ga.

In Elon's "first season," or nonconference play, the Phoenix finished 1-2. While not the start the Phoenix wanted to commence the year, Lembo is quick to point out the level of competition the Phoenix faced in two losses to Duke University and the University of Richmond, respectively, as well as a win against Shaw University.

"The good news for our guys is that this is the toughest nonconference schedule we've ever had," Lembo said, noting games against an Football Bowl Subdivision team and a top-10 matchup against the 2008 National Champion Richmond Spiders. "We'll see some really good teams in the next few weeks, and I think our prior experience (this season) will help."

A historic power with six Football Championship Subdivision national championships, Georgia Southern comes into Saturday's game looking for revenge against a Phoenix team that has defeated the Eagles in its three prior contests.

Lembo looks back to the 2007 Phoenix tilt against the Eagles as a defining moment that turned Elon football into a national contender, with an unexpected 36-33 double-overtime upset of the Eagles.

"Three or four years ago, we were the spoilers who were sneaking up on teams and shocking them," Lembo said. "Now we're the ones with a

bulls-eye on our back."

The commencement of league play brings parity and an extra level of competition that Lembo said his team is well aware of.

"I think our guys understand when conference play rolls around, you have to be playing your best football."

While the Phoenix has finished second in the SoCon for the previous two years, Lembo said he is coaching his players to give that extra push throughout the season, hoping that it helps the Phoenix get over the hump and win its first-ever SoCon championship in football.

"Coach said that it's all about your identity," said junior linebacker Joshua Jones. "We're still striving to be the best in the conference and I think we can be."

Ranked No. 10 in The Sporting News poll, the Phoenix has three remaining contests on its schedule against nationally ranked football teams, starting with this weekend's matchup against Georgia Southern, followed by games against No. 2 Appalachian State University and No. 23 Furman University.

Those three matchups will prove pivotal in shaping the conference outlook, but Lembo noted the importance of preparing for each team individually, rather than looking ahead to later in the season.

"When you get into conference play, the mentality is that ever game is a championship game," Lembo said. "The league has had incredible parity in the last few years, and you have to know that a lot can happen on any given weekend."

A successful "second season" is what coach Lembo said he hopes will give the Phoenix momentum carrying into a hopeful "third season" as described by the coach, a second straight trip to the FCS playoffs.



Sophomore wide receiver Aaron Mellette (left) set the Elon record for most receptions in a game Sept. 18 against Shaw University. Mellette had 18 catches for 195 yards and two touchdowns. FILE PHOTO

5 things to look for against Georgia Southern

1. Can the Phoenix offense establish its rush attack? Against Richmond, the Phoenix ran for just 73 yards, and 27 yards came on a run by sophomore punter John Reece for a fake punt. The team had gained 324 yards on the ground in its first two games.
2. What will Aaron Mellette do for an encore? With a Terrell Hudgins-esque performance (18 catches, 195 yards and two touchdowns), the sophomore wide receiver recorded the most catches in a single game in school history. So what will Mellette do against Georgia Southern University?
3. Can the Phoenix capture a road victory? Both Phoenix losses this season have come on the road, and this weekend the team travels to another hostile environment in Statesboro. The last time the team visited Georgia Southern, the Phoenix needed a last second field goal from Andrew Wilcox to beat the Eagles.
4. Will the Phoenix find discipline? After committing 15 penalties combined in its first two games, the Phoenix committed 11 penalties against the Spiders. What hurt more was that five of the penalties resulted in first downs for the University of Richmond.
5. How will the team begin its conference slate? With Georgia Southern, the Phoenix will have its first Southern Conference opponent of 2010. Last season, the team went 7-1 in the conference, and in the seven victories the team averaged a win differential of nearly 24 points.



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For the second year, the Elon University men's and women's cross country teams hosted the Elon Invitational, and for the second year, they finished near the top.

Both the men and women saw second-place finishes at the Sept. 17 meet, finishing just behind the UNC Greensboro teams.

The men fell short of first place by just one point, led by seniors Justin Gianni and Matt Richardson, who finished third and fourth overall, respectively. Both runners finished with personal-best times — Gianni with a time of 25:15 and Richardson with a time of 25:26.

Senior Emily Fournier held the best finish on the women's team, with a time of 18:24 for fourth place, to lead the Phoenix to 37 points — nine points behind UNCG. Three other women finished in the top-10: freshman Allyson Oram in sixth, sophomore Chrissy Pacewicz in eighth and senior Catherine Rossi in ninth.

The cross country teams will compete next Oct. 2 in the Louisville Classic and the Hagan Stone Classic.



The men's and women's cross country teams both came in second out of five teams in their second annual Elon Invitational Sept. 18, hosted by the Phoenix teams and held on the Phoenix Trails. JULIA MURPHY | Staff Photographer