



Phoenix looks to sharpen defense against Samford

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The key to winning on Saturdays, Elon head football coach Pete Lembo said, isn't simply dictated by how the team performs each weekend. Rather, it is a collection of a week's efforts to be displayed each Saturday afternoon in the fall.

"It's about having a great week of practice first and foremost," Lembo said. "When we have great weeks of practice, Saturdays have a way of taking care of themselves."

Having an intentional and effective full week of practice is just what the Phoenix needs after a 38-21 defeat to the Georgia Southern Eagles last weekend.

With a 1-3 start, the Phoenix hasn't exactly gotten off to the hot start it had hoped for. With two nonconference losses — to Duke University and the University of Richmond, and its Southern Conference blemish against Georgia Southern, Lembo has stressed to his team the importance of what a week of practice can do to prepare a team.

"We have to continue to be intentional about drills and coverages in practice in order for us to have success in games," Lembo said.

While the Phoenix offense has scored an average of 31 points per game through its first four contests, the defense has been the team's Achilles' heel, giving up 33 points and nearly 450 yards of total offense per game.

A veteran offensive unit has carried the Phoenix through the first stretch of the season, while the defense has been developing and maturing over time. For example, against Georgia Southern last weekend, Lembo started three freshmen and a sophomore against a veteran unit of wide receivers for the Eagles. Noting 11 new starters to the

team, with a majority of the starters being on the defensive side of the ball, Lembo said it is has taken some time to work players into the fold and sustain playing at a high level for the length of the game.

The Phoenix has started fast in its first four games, outscoring its opponent 83-68 in the first half. Where Elon has struggled this season is after halftime, where opponents have outscored the Phoenix 64-41.

Saturday's game was a perfect example. At the half, the Phoenix was tied with the Eagles at 14. In the second half, Georgia Southern outscored Elon 24-7 on its way to a decisive victory.

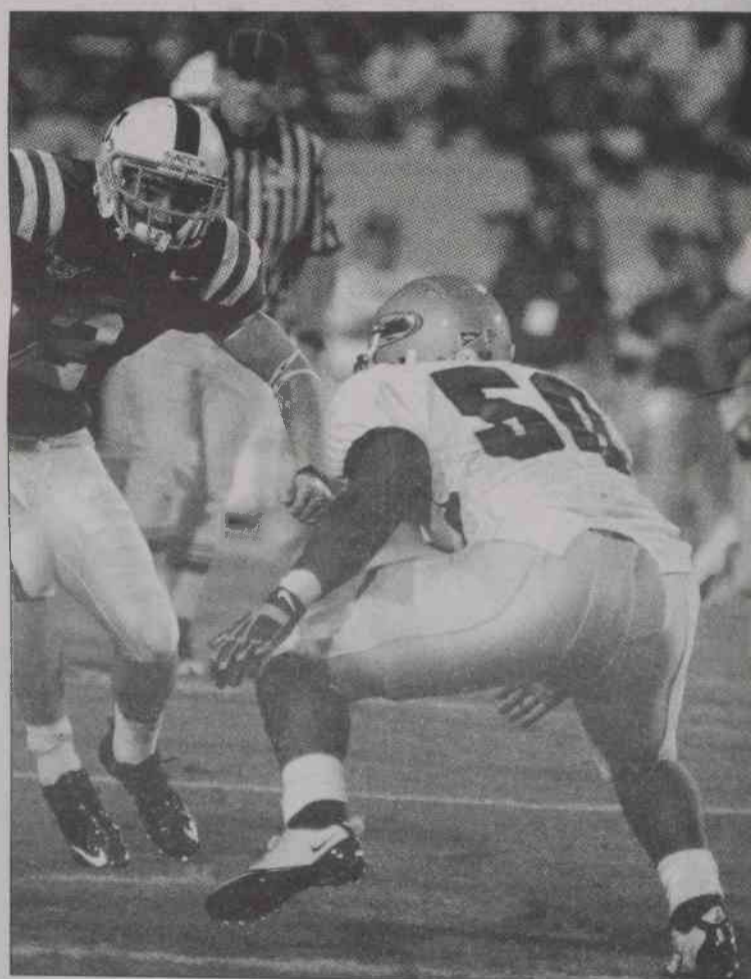
"When you see glimpses of good execution, you know what your team is capable of," Lembo said. "What we've talked a lot about is doing it consistently for 60 minutes...it starts on the practice field."

While emphasizing working together as a unit, senior linebacker Travis Greene said the individual focus of each teammate on the unit will help the Phoenix defense progress and grow as a collective group.

"You really have to be prepared for every snap," Greene said. "Guys have to maintain that focus, and I think sometimes we get caught not being focused on every play and that can hurt us."

Facing Samford University at 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Rhodes Stadium, Lembo said his team's defense will have plenty of opportunity this week to prepare for Samford's offense, as it is similar to what the Phoenix offense runs throughout the season.

"Samford is very similar to ourselves offensively," Lembo said. "(This week) we are able to really prepare for what they are going to throw at us because our defense will be going against similar coverages all week."



Above: In the 38-21 loss against Georgia Southern University, the Phoenix defense surrendered 30 first downs for 508 total yards of offense and five touchdowns while recording only one sack and tackle for a loss.
Below: The Elon defense has allowed just over 444 yards per game this year.

5 things to look for against Samford

1. Can the Phoenix defense improve? The story of the season thus far has been the inability of the Phoenix to stop opposing offenses from moving the ball. The unit has given up an average of 444.5 yards per game, including 508 yards against Georgia Southern.

2. Will the team establish a rushing attack? After gaining a combined 324 rushing yards in its first two games, the Phoenix has rushed for a meek 82 yards in the last 2 games. The team has struggled to establish a running game early in games, and has been forced to become a one-dimensional offense in the second half of games.

3. Can Scott Riddle continue to lead the Phoenix offense? While the team's running game has struggled, senior quarterback Scott Riddle has piled up passing yards and touchdowns. He has thrown 10 touchdowns this season to go along with 1,166 yards, which is an average of 291.5 yards per game.

4. Can Lance Camp return to the lineup? The senior wide receiver and kick returner sprained his ankle in the first play of the team's game against Richmond and missed Saturday's game. In the first two games of the season, Camp put together 318 all-purpose yards.

5. What will the defense do to slow down Chris Evans? The Bulldogs' senior running back has rushed for 1,000 yards in every season for the Bulldogs, and entered the season as the school's all-time leading rusher. After the Phoenix defense surrendered 379 rushing yards against Georgia Southern, they face another tough task in shutting down Evans.

BY THE NUMBERS

379 total rushing yards by the Georgia Southern offense

9 total rushing yards by the Elon offense

0 rushing first downs by the Phoenix

10 of 17 third downs converted by the Eagles

38:27 minutes of possession for Georgia Southern

3 sacks allowed by the Phoenix

121 yards receiving for sophomore Aaron Mellette on six catches

3 of 3 on fourth down conversions for Georgia Southern

17 plays of 10 yards or more surrendered by the Phoenix defense.

BREAKING DOWN THE GSU GAME