

Sports

Team builds off early struggles, finishes with winning season

Jack Rodenfels
Senior Reporter

Nine seconds left on the clock. Elon is tied with Wofford College on Oct. 23 at 21 points apiece from Rhodes Stadium, looking to force overtime.

Wofford junior quarterback Mitch Allen heaves a pass skyward, a 41-yard desperation toss. It is caught, and Wofford beats Elon in a heartbreaking 28-21 loss. The Phoenix drops to 2-5, with a 1-3 ledger in the Southern Conference.

"Some groups get more adversity than others, this group handled themselves well throughout," said Elon head coach Pete Lembo. "I think there's a lot of life lessons that have been learned that will stay with (the players) forever."

Despite its 2-5 start, the Phoenix rallied to win its final four games of the season and finish with a 6-5 overall record, while closing the season with a 5-3 ledger in the SoCon.

Coming off a 9-3 season in 2009 and making the FCS playoffs for the first time in school history, Elon was looking to build off its 2009 successes, while hoping to make the playoffs in back-to-back years.

The Phoenix lost three of its first four games, with one of its losses against Football Bowl Subdivision foe Duke University, and an overtime loss to the University of Richmond — Elon's opponent in

its 2009 playoff game. Elon's lone win in its first four games came at the hands of Shaw University, in a 55-26 drubbing.

After its 1-3 start, the team traveled to Boone to face Appalachian State University. Coming into the game-winning 14 straight over the Phoenix dating back to 1964, Appalachian State and Elon battled until late in the fourth quarter, when the Mountaineers pulled away, winning 34-31.

Following the Mountaineers' loss was the defeat at the hands of the Wofford Terriers, dropping the Phoenix to 2-5 — a record the program hadn't seen since 2004.

"This group doesn't get too high and they don't get too low," Lembo said. "I think that has allowed them to work through the season and finish on a positive note."

In its final four games of the season — all wins — Elon outscored its opponents 151-90. The Phoenix surrendered more than 33 points per game in its five losses, while only allowing 22 points per game in its six wins, led largely by an improved secondary who regularly started three freshmen.

"The guys that are going to play next year will be really talented," said senior wide receiver Sean Jeffcoat. "They're going to have some really good seasons coming up in the near future because they got a lot of experience this year."

BY THE NUMBERS

28-6

touchdowns-interceptions for Scott Riddle

12

receiving touchdowns by Aaron Mellette

1065

receiving yards for Sean Jeffcoat

116

tackles by Brandom Wiggins

4

interceptions by Blake Thompson

914

total yards for A.J. Harris

5.1

yards per carry for Brandon Newsome

13

sacks and interceptions, each, for the Phoenix

112.8

rushing yards per game

BREAKING DOWN THE FOOTBALL SEASON

The team graduates 17 seniors from its 2010 program, many who have been major contributors for Elon football during the last four years.

"It takes great players to turn programs around. Scott (Riddle) and so many of these other guys came here, and there was nothing," Lembo said. "(These



Senior wide receiver Lance Camp caught his first touchdown pass of the season against Western Carolina in the football team's season-ending 45-14 win Nov. 20 at Rhodes Stadium.

HEATHER CASSANO | Staff Photographer

seniors) were great players who believed in us, came here and got some pretty good results."

The senior class leaves the Elon program with four consecutive winning seasons, a mark that hasn't been achieved since a nine-season winning streak

from 1980-1988.

Lembo talks about the identity that Elon football has developed with the maturity of the program, largely because of the performance of this year's seniors. His second recruiting class since joining the Phoenix in 2006, Lembo

looks to the graduating seniors as a cornerstone of a successful program in the future.

"Because of what this group has been able to do, we have a lot more credibility when we go out and recruit," Lembo said. "We can be a lot more selective now."

The air up there: Riddle finishes prolific career at Elon



Senior quarterback Scott Riddle finished his Elon football career with 13,264 passing yards and 105 passing touchdowns.

HEATHER CASSANO | Staff Photographer

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He threw for 13,264 career yards. He recorded 105 touchdowns. He had touchdown passes in 44 of his 45 starts.

All of these numbers belong to Scott Riddle, the most decorated passer in the history of the Southern Conference. But ask anyone who knows Riddle: it's much more than numbers and statistics that define his four years at the helm of the Phoenix aerial attack.

"Because of Scott, we have an identity now," said head coach Pete Lembo. "When people think about Elon football, they think of one of the best passing teams in the country. You don't do that by just drawing plays up. You need guys to execute it, and that's what we have."

A 2010 Walter Payton Award finalist, in a yard given

to the nation's top Football Championship Subdivision player, Riddle has set major records — both in the SoCon and in FCS.

His 1,168 completions are first all-time in FCS history, and his 13,264 career passing yards ranks fourth all-time.

Riddle led the SoCon in passing in each of his four seasons under center for the Phoenix, a record that has never before been accomplished in the 90-plus year history of the conference. Riddle threw for at least 200 yards in 40 games as quarterback, while throwing for at least 300 yards 23 times in his four seasons.

Riddle, son of Elon Hall of Fame quarterback Jimmy Riddle, has started under center for the Phoenix since his first game in his freshman year at the University of South Florida. Although a 28-13 loss to South Florida, Riddle

completed 33 of 54 throws in his debut performance against a team that would climb as high as No. 2 in the BCS ranking in the 2007 season.

Since then, he's only missed one start, which came against The Citadel Nov. 6 of this season.

From that first game, Riddle has been the leader of the Phoenix offense, one which currently ranks second in passing offense in the FCS for the 2010 season, according to The Sports Network.

Although Elon will move ahead next season with a new quarterback under center, the Phoenix faithful will not soon forget the impact that Riddle had in dynamic four-year career.

"Scott has had such a wonderful career," Lembo said. "He's one of the great ones and has really helped put the Elon football program on the map."