

Foundation set for the future of men's basketball

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Assistant Sports Editor

From the beginning of the men's basketball season Nov. 12, Elon University head coach Matt Matheny said a focus of the team was to build on the solid foundation that had been established last year in his first season as head coach.

It was a mantra that held firm through the team's 4-1 start in the newly renovated Alumni Gym, as well as through the five-game losing streak from Jan. 27 to Feb. 9.

The Phoenix's season came to a close with a 78-60 loss to the College of Charleston March 5 in Chattanooga, Tenn. at the Southern Conference Tournament.

"This year was a very big step forward for our program, and it is more than just the number of wins," Matheny said. "We have a stronger foundation with the way our guys interact with each other, with the way our guys appreciate our program, with the way our guys like our coaches and interact with our coaches."

Finishing with a 14-17 overall record and 7-11 conference mark shows improvement from Matheny's first season, when the team was 9-23 and 5-13.

But Matheny made it clear throughout the

season that the team's improvement would be measured in more than just records.

"We want to continue to take steps forward, and I'm encouraged," Matheny said. "We took a good step last year, we laid a firm foundation and we have now solidified the base."

Elon's first conference game, an 85-74 win against The Citadel, could be a microcosm of the team's growth.

Elon had four players score in double figures, landed 11 of 22 3-point attempts and committed just seven turnovers. The Phoenix also hit more than half of its field goals, shooting at a 28 of 54 clip.

The story of the game was a feature that will be missed next year, as senior guard Chris Long led the team with 21 points and dished out 10 assists. Before the start of the tournament, Long was named to the All-SoCon second team by conference media members.

"Any time you lose an all-conference player, he will be missed," Matheny said.

As for Long, he had no regrets following his last game in an Elon uniform.

"I'm not disappointed in anything (about my career)," Long said. "It has been a good four years."

He closed the season on a roll, as he averaged more than 21 points per game

in the four games before the tournament started. The Phoenix won three of those four games.

But in the contest against the Cougars, the No. 1 seed from the South Division, senior guard Andrew Goudeock was too much for Elon, as he scored 25 points on 9-17 shooting. He stands as the fourth leading scorer in the country with 23.3 points per game.

"He is going to score," said junior guard Drew Spradlin. "The goal is to make it as difficult as possible. We executed to a certain extent, just not well enough in the first half."

Facing a halftime deficit of 43-22, the Phoenix won the second half battle with a 38-35 score.

"It got away from us a little bit in the first half, and I thought our kids really fought in the second half," Matheny said.

Whether winning or losing, fighting was a constant theme of the past season.

The team lost one game by more than 20 points, to then-No. 1 Duke University. Last year, the team lost six games by more than 20 points.

Elon finished the season with the second ranked scoring offense in the conference, with 74.2 points per game. The Phoenix also led the conference with 285



Junior guard Drew Spradlin scored 15 points against The Citadel while shooting 5 for 9 from the field. COREY GROOM | Photographer

3-point shots made, which stands for an average of more than nine made shots from behind the arc per game.

Matheny said after the loss to the Cougars, Long and fellow senior forwards

Scott Grable and David Meyer will be missed, but reiterated that the team has set a strong foundation for growth.

"This program will move forward, and we feel like we have a

strong enough base that somebody will step up in (Long's) role, other guys will step up in other roles and next year's team will be different, but the future is very bright for this program," Matheny said.

Baseball goes 3-1 hosting Elon Invitational, faces Saint Joseph's

Jack Rodenfels
Sports Editor

Pitching and hitting both came alive last weekend, March 4-6 as the Elon baseball team went 3-1 in the Elon Invitational.

The Phoenix lost its first game of the weekend March 4 9-4 to Wright State University but rebounded to outscore opponents 35-6 in the final three games of the Elon Invitational.

"Our starting pitching was consistent throughout the entire weekend," said head coach Mike Kennedy. "In all four games, the pitchers went six innings strong and gave the team a chance to

win."

One of the main differences between Elon's first game of the tournament and the following three was relief pitching.

On Friday, Elon's relief pitching combined to allow seven earned runs, with five of those surrendered by senior Thomas Girdwood, who was named to the 2011 Preseason Stopper of the Year Watch List, honoring the top relief pitcher in Division I baseball.

In the two games for the Phoenix Sat. and Sun. the bullpen allowed only two runs.

"We certainly didn't have to panic over our pitching after (Friday)," Kennedy said. "We were able to get timely hitting

throughout the weekend, and it allowed us to win by large margins."

While the Phoenix plated 39 runs in four games, no player was more consistent throughout the past week than senior infielder Neal Pritchard.

Reaching base safely in each game, Pritchard batted .615 with two home runs and eight RBI. Additionally, Pritchard had four RBI in Saturday's game against the West Virginia University Mountaineers.

His play garnered Southern Conference Player of the Week honors for the first time in his Elon career.

"We've had a lot of confidence in our pitching staff this season, and it rubs off on the hitting," sophomore outfielder Niko Fraser said. "As a hitter, it's contagious and you are relaxed under pressure and can better perform."

The Phoenix hitting has been hot to begin the year, as four regular starters are averaging above a .300 batting average.

Looking ahead:

Wednesday
4 p.m. vs.
St. Joseph's
University

Friday 3 p.m.
at Appalachian
State University

Saturday 2 p.m.
at App. State

Sunday 1 p.m. at
App. State

Four players have more than 10 hits in the team's first 12 games, with sophomore catcher Alex Swim leading the Phoenix with 18 hits.

"We need to continue to be consistent while hitting," Kennedy said. "We've had highs and lows, it's all about having a consistent approach at the plate, and to get timely hits."

While the Phoenix is 8-4 on the season, the team needs to get better at situational hitting, Kennedy said.

"When we have runners on second and third with less than two outs, we have to get better at bringing the runs in" Kennedy said. "We have kids trying to do too much with the bat, and they are coming off of the ball and not hitting it squarely."

The Phoenix hosts the Saint Joseph University Hawks 4 p.m. today, March 9 and travels to Boone for a three-game set against the Appalachian State University Mountaineers starting Friday, March 11.



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