



# FOOTBALL



## ANOTHER YEAR BRINGS ANOTHER QUARTERBACK

Sam Calvert  
Online Magazine Editor

At the end of the 2011 season, the Elon University football team had a question mark in place of a quarterback on the depth chart. Four-year starter Scott Riddle graduated, and the question of who was going to take his place remained.

"It's just the way things go," senior offensive lineman Rodney Austin said. "There's always going to be a group of seniors leaving. We were always ready for that."

There were two candidates for the job: then-sophomore Thomas Wilson and then-freshman Mike Quinn. The two then began competing for the starting position.

"It was intense," junior Wilson said. "It started in the spring."

Then redshirt freshman Tyler Smith, a transfer from the University of Maryland, came onto the scene, and the competition opened up among three players.

But Smith had more than just an offensive system to learn.

"Tyler is just coming on campus," head coach Jason Swepson said. "He's only been on campus three months, so he's still learning the area, not just learning the playbook."

As time went on, the competition shifted its focus primarily to Smith and Wilson, with Quinn coming in as the third-string quarterback.

But Swepson said he admired Quinn for his determination and drive.

"He came in fighting for a starting position," Swepson said. "He wasn't looking for a No. 2 spot. He wanted to be the guy."

Toward the end, Wilson began to separate himself from the other two, and by the last day of preseason camp, Swepson said he would have to play very poorly and Smith really well for Wilson to lose the starting role.

"(Wilson) knows the playbook inside and out," Swepson said. "With this offense, there's a lot of moving parts. Tyler was struggling a little bit with all the motions and shifts and things like that. It came easy to Thomas."

Wilson has had the offensive playbook since offensive coordinator Chris Pincince came on staff in January, an opportunity Swepson said Wilson took advantage of.

"I'm really looking forward to going out there and kind of proving myself and showing that I can do what it takes to be a quarterback," Wilson said. "My job is just to get the ball into our playmakers' hands and letting them make plays."

Wilson will be proving himself against the shadow of his predecessor, Riddle, who finished his Elon career with 41 Elon, Southern Conference or NCAA records.

Wilson watched on as the backup quarterback for three of Riddle's seasons.

"I don't want to sit here and try and

compare myself to Scott or anyone else in the past, or anyone here in the present," Wilson said. "I'm just trying to get in there and manage the game and do what a quarterback has to do to win football games."

Last season, he made appearances in four games, one of which was as the starting quarterback against The Citadel. In that win, he threw for 145 yards and rushed for 13, with two touchdown passes.

But securing the starting job is just the beginning for Wilson.

"He'll win it for one game, but he's always got to compete each week," Swepson said.

Regardless of the starting quarterback, Swepson said Smith will not just sit on the sidelines.

"You don't want your second-string quarterback not having any reps and then, in Game 6, call on him and he's rusty and hasn't played in the game," Swepson said. "We've got to find a way to get him some snaps."

Swepson even said there was a possibility for a rotation, like they've done in the past at Boston College, his alma mater. But those details still have to be discussed by the coaching staff.

Either way, when the Phoenix takes the field this season, there will be a new face there under center.

"We know what it's like to run an offense underneath Scott Riddle," Austin said. "But now we have to learn how to run an offense under Thomas Wilson."



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY AMANDA BENDER

## Mellette looks to relish in enhanced role

Jack Rodenfels  
Sports Editor

After snaring only eight balls for 117 yards his freshman season, it was hard to imagine junior wide receiver Aaron Mellette would be very productive the following year.

But in 2010, Mellette had a quick start to his sophomore campaign, and it carried him throughout the season. In the third game, he recorded an Elon-record 18 receptions for 195 yards and two touchdowns at then-No. 9 Richmond.

Additionally, Mellette recorded five other games with more than 100 yards receiving and five games with at least two receiving touchdowns.

For the 2010 season, he caught 86 balls for 1,100 yards and 12 touchdowns. His play on the field earned him a first-team All-Southern Conference selection and second-team All-America honors from the Associated Press.

Now as a junior, Mellette's role has transformed in the Phoenix offense, as he becomes the primary target for first-year starting quarterback, junior Thomas Wilson.

In 2010, he paired up with senior Sean Jeffcoat, who caught 72 balls for more than 1,000 yards. The two accounted for nearly 60 percent of Elon's passing yards, and almost 70 percent of the team's touchdown passes.

With the graduation of Jeffcoat, Mellette said he looks forward to the next crop of receivers who will contribute to the Elon offense.

The Phoenix brings in six newcomers to the receiving core for the 2011 season — Andre Davis, Ricky Brown, Kyle Huff, Ivan Ledesma, Danny Sellers and Tario Hunter.

Of the newcomers to the offense, Davis earned All-State accolades, while Brown, Huff, Ledesma and Sellers earned All-Conference honors.

"(We're) finding the next playmaker," Mellette said. "It's important to find another receiver to step in and take some of the pressure off."

Mellette's 6-foot-4-inch, 212-pound frame is difficult for opposing defenses to match up against, and size is what the coaching staff looks to take advantage of this year, offensive coordinator Chris Pincince said.

"He gives us a threat and can go the distance every time," Pincince said. "Because of his size and his physical stature, we can throw the ball up to him and he'll make a play."

The coaching staff also knows that Mellette will see increased defensive coverage with his expanded role in the offense throughout the year, Pincince said.

"If a defense leaves him one-on-one, I feel pretty good," Pincince said. "But defenses aren't dumb. They're going to put a couple of people on him, and that will open things up for other people. He creates mismatches."

Coming into the 2011 season,

more than just opposing defenses are taking notice of Mellette. He has been named to the second-team preseason All-America team, is on the watch list for the top wide receiver in the nation, given by the College Football Performance Awards, and is named a second team All-American by the College Sporting News.

To take the pressure off of Mellette and Wilson, Elon will look to a group of senior running backs — A.J. Harris, Jamal Shuman and Dontay Taylor. They will provide balance for the Phoenix offense this year and to break down opposing defenses, allowing Wilson to connect with Mellette for another successful season.

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