

Sports

Football moves ahead to 'new season'

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Sports Editor

First-year head coach Jason Swepson preaches to his team to "never disrespect a win."

This mindset is one the Elon Phoenix football team took to heart following its embattled 23-22 victory against the North Carolina Central University Eagles Sept. 16, and one it will continue to embrace as conference play begins this weekend.

Against the Eagles, the Phoenix offense had moments of greatness, such as junior quarterback Thomas Wilson's career high 416 yards passing and three touchdowns or junior wide receiver Aaron Mellette's 16-catch 237-yard performance that garnered him both Southern Conference Player of the Week and College Football Performance Awards National Wider Receiver of the Week honors.

But the Phoenix registered five turnovers, compared to no turnovers for the Eagles' offense and was lucky to get out of the game against the Eagles with a win, according to senior wide receiver Christian Dennis.

"It was such an emotional game with so many ups and downs," Dennis said. "We would have some great drives and they would be stopped due to a turnover or a stalled drive."

Although the turnovers hurt, Swepson said the experience of the game was critically important, especially for a young team.

"If you want to be a great team, you have to win on the road," Swepson said. "We still have a lot of work to do, more we are getting better, getting more experience as we go."

The Phoenix finished 2-1 in nonconference play, and begins SoCon play against The Citadel Bulldogs.

This week in practice, Swepson is instilling the importance of a new beginning to his players.

"We're learning to forget about the first three games," he said. "It's a new season for us, and we're taking this as game one and we're going to try and get off on the right foot."

For Swepson, this means defending The Citadel's patented triple option offense — one that relies heavily on running the football.

The Citadel Bulldogs are averaging 319 rushing yards per game, the highest amount in the SoCon.

To prepare during the summer and preseason, Swepson had his defense work for 10 minutes at the end of each practice on defending the triple option. This week, it's the defensive approach that the Phoenix will work on.

"Defensively, we can't give up the big play," Swepson said. "We understand that they're going to rush for a bunch of yards, and that's fine. We're going to have to play stingy defense when they get on our side of the 50 and especially in the red zone, we have to hold them



TOP: Senior running back A.J. Harris rushed for a total of 48 yards on 14 touches in Elon's 23-22 win against North Carolina Central Sept. 17.

PHOTOS BY AL DRAGO | Photographer

BOTTOM: Junior wide receiver Aaron Mellette caught for 237 yards and accounted for one of Elon's three touchdowns in the Phoenix win.

to field goals, not touchdowns."

On the other side of the ball, controlling the time of possession will be key in order for the Phoenix to win, while converting scoring chances into touchdowns, not relying on field goals, Swepson said.

The Citadel comes into its game with much experience. Returning nine starters from its 2010 team, The Citadel leads the SoCon in scoring defense (12.5 points per game), yards allowed (228 yards per game) and passing yards allowed (132 yards per game).

Additionally, the Bulldogs are coming off of their bye week and have had two weeks to watch film and prepare for the Phoenix.

Elon is looking inwardly to prepare offensively for The Citadel as the team looks to eliminate turnovers while balancing the run with the pass.

"It's going to be a focal point," Swepson said, describing the team concentrating on not turning the ball over. "What I'm mostly disappointed in is having turnovers in the fourth quarter. It's what happened against North Carolina Central, and it almost cost us the game."

The Phoenix will begin its SoCon season Sept. 24 with a 1:30 p.m. kickoff against the Bulldogs.



LOOKING AHEAD

Saturday 1:30 p.m. (Family Weekend)
vs. The Citadel

Can't make it to the game, but don't want to miss any of the football action? Follow the Phoenix online with *The Pendulum* this weekend.

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BREAKING DOWN THE NC CENTRAL GAME

BY THE NUMBERS

- 0 points scored by either time in the third quarter
- 1 point difference in the 23-22 win
- 2 touchdown catches for senior wide receiver Christian Dennis, his first of the season
- 3 interceptions thrown by junior quarterback Thomas Wilson
- 7 tackles for sophomore defensive back Chandler Wrightenberry, a team-high
- 8.7 average yards per pass attempt for Wilson
- 19 players on the Elon defense with at least one tackle
- 237 receiving yards for junior wide receiver Aaron Mellette
- 535 total yards of offense for Elon, the most in a game this season