

Bierut looks to guide Phoenix deeper into championship season

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Senior Reporter

For decades, conventional wisdom suggested college was a time for young men and women to mature. It was an opportunity to get their feet wet in the real world and the ability to go out on their own. But according to head cross country coach Christine Engel, it was sophomore Elyse Bierut's maturity that brought her to Elon.

"Her maturity was one of the reasons I recruited her," she said. "I saw that from our first meeting in her junior year of high school. Her workout routine and discipline was evident. I knew there was something special about her back then."

Once Bierut got on campus, she continued to grow.

"She brought that maturity to another level once she stepped foot at Elon," Engel said.

Bierut herself did not acknowledge much about her discipline other than having goals and looking to achieve them any way possible.

"The goal is always to get better and to improve," Bierut said. "I've been working really [hard] with my coaches, focusing on the little things to do what I need to do at practice on a daily basis."

In her first competitive collegiate race, Bierut and then-junior Allyson Oram won the combined 5,000 meter event to place first overall at the Demon Deacon Quad and help the women's team to a first-place finish in the 2012 season's first event. The pair combined for an impressive time of 37:28.

Bierut also put herself in the Elon record book by running the second fastest 6K at the NCAA Pre-Nationals and the third-fastest 6K two weeks later at the Southern Conference Championships. Her eighth-place finish overall earned Bierut a spot on the Second Team all-Conference.

Despite Bierut's success, her thrill was short-lived as the Phoenix lost out on the overall conference championship by just four points. Now, Bierut and the rest of the Phoenix are looking for a shot at redemption.

"Missing out on the conference championship has made us hungry to come back stronger and finish stronger this year," Bierut said.

Engel knows how much it stung the team to lose by such a close margin, but she said it will also help them get back in the chase

in 2013.

"Any time you come that close to a championship, you want to be back in the hunt again," Engel said.

For Bierut, she returns to a familiar environment as she comes back for her second season with the team.

"It's nice to come back in as a sophomore having that experience of my first collegiate season under my belt," she said.

Thanks to her teammates, Bierut said she will not be getting too comfortable this season.

"Complacency is not an issue," Bierut said. "It's easy to stay motivated. We have a highly motivated group of girls and coach [Engel] is very motivated. We say, 'Every day is another day to get better,' and we go in

with that mindset every day."

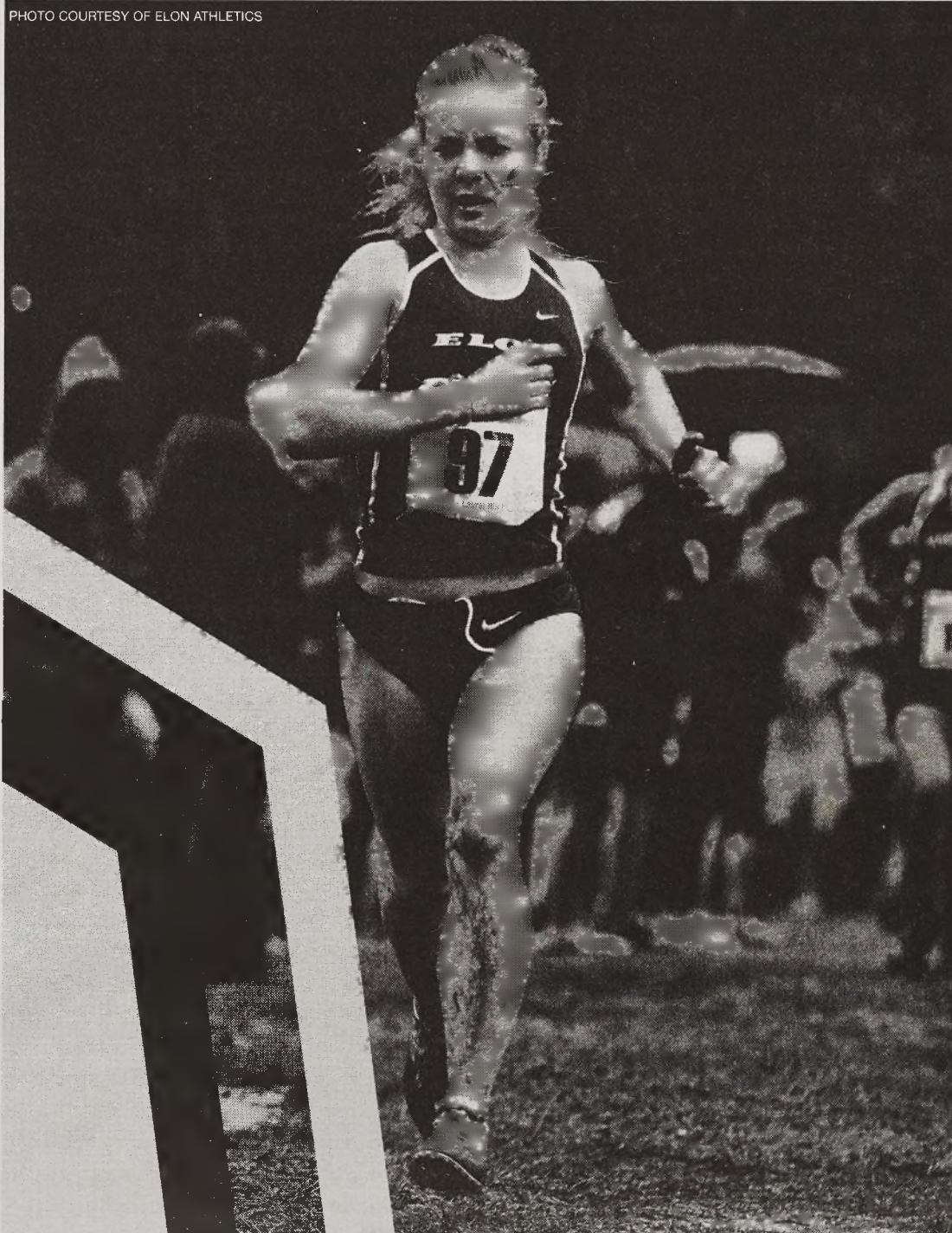
Engel acknowledged it will be a highly contested race to determine the conference champions. But she feels the team is already showing signs of what it takes to come out on top.

"It's going to be extremely competitive with Furman, App State and UNCG looking strong," Engel said. "But the girls have really done their homework over the summer and have come back very fit."

Even after an impressive start to her Phoenix cross country career and an extremely difficult conference competition on the horizon, nerves are not getting to Bierut. She admits worrying is not a problem for her.

"Coach Engel does the worrying, so I don't have to," she said.

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Cross Country Schedule

Demon Deacon Quad

Aug. 30, All day — Winston-Salem, N.C.

Elon Invitational

Sept. 14, 9 a.m. — Elon, N.C.

Charlotte Invitational

Sept. 14, TBD — Charlotte, N.C.

Blue Ridge Open

Oct. 17, TBD — Boone, N.C.

NCAA Pre-National

Oct. 19, TBD — Terra Haute, Ind.

Southern Conference Championships

Nov. 2, TBD — Birmingham, Ala.

NC State Three Stripe Invitational

Nov. 9, TBD — Raleigh, N.C.

NCAA Southeast Regional Championships

Nov. 15, TBD — Charlottesville, Va.