

Elon happy but not satisfied after historic week

Tommy Hamzik
Sports Editor

As the final fans left a sold-out Alumni Gym following Elon University's 84-74 loss to No. 15 University of Massachusetts on Jan. 18, many held their heads high.

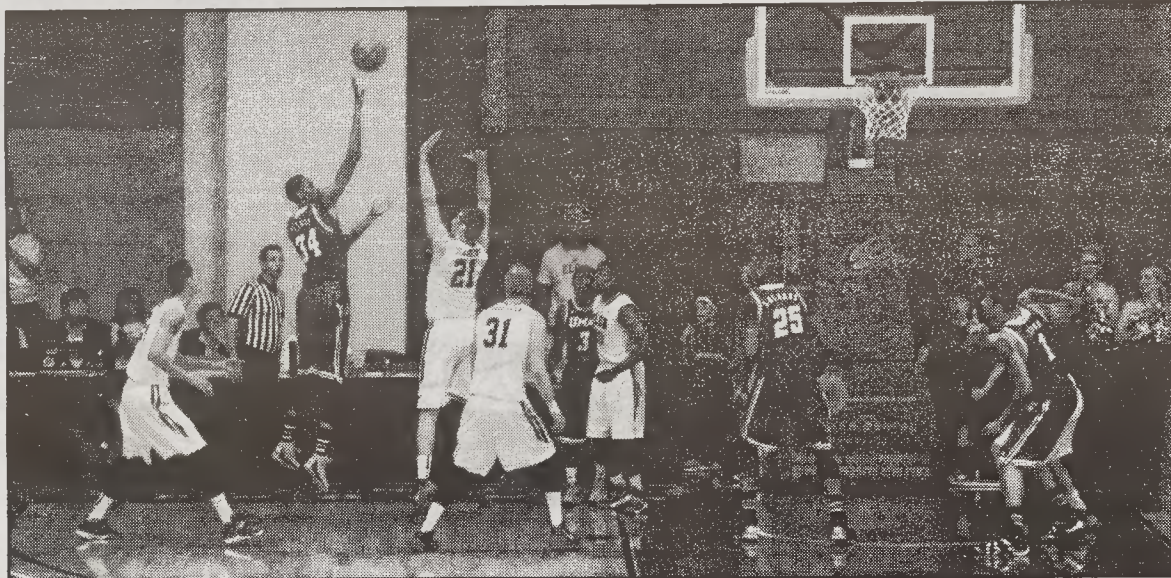
The Phoenix was coming off a historic 87-85 overtime win at Davidson College on Jan. 16 and held its ground a Top 20 team, the first ranked opponent that had ever visited Elon.

When asked about where the team is as a whole, senior forward Lucas Troutman gathered his thoughts about the historic week for the program and was able to put it all into perspective.

"We're not content with where we're at," Troutman said. "We still want to get better. But we've made drastic improvements to where we were starting to where we are at now," he said. "Defensively and offensively, we've struggled moving. Now, we're getting to the basket, getting those scores. Now, we have to bring back the defense too and get those stops, get those steals, and cut out some of those fouls to put us in the game."

The Phoenix is 10-9 for the season, but 3-1 where it matters – in the Southern Conference. From here on out, there's nothing but conference games on the schedule. All of those lead up to the SoCon Tournament in Asheville which will take place March 7-10.

The win over Davidson was a massive step forward in the SoCon. The Phoenix made a statement to the entire league by coming back from a 14-point deficit with less than five minutes left to not only force overtime but hang on and win in a hostile environ-



MEAGAN CASAVANT | Staff Photographer

The post presense of UMass led the Minutemen to an 84-74 win over Elon on Jan. 18.

ment. In doing so, Elon ended Davidson's 23-game home SoCon winning streak and posted a win inside Belk Arena for the first time in 10 games.

"The hard thing is now we have to go and focus one game at a time," senior guard Jack Isenbarger said after beating Davidson. "It's easy to get excited. It's going to be a fight every time you play a conference game."

The Phoenix will have to go through Davidson at least one more time — a March 1 tilt in Alumni Gym — before the season wraps. But the Wildcats aren't the only opponent that Elon has to worry about in the SoCon.

Next on the slate is a Jan. 23 matchup on the road with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The Mocs currently sit atop the league standings with a mark of 6-0. Also approaching are challenging road tests at Samford University and University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Western Carolina University, which beat Elon on Jan. 4, pays a

visit to Alumni Gym, as does Wofford College, Samford and Davidson.

"Conference play is unpredictable," senior guard Sebastian Koch said. "Anything can happen. Every team is good."

Elon coach Matt Matheny said he was concerned about the mindset of his team following the monumental Davidson win. The Phoenix had nationally-ranked UMass coming in to Alumni Gym less than 48 hours later, and had just exhausted nearly every bit of energy to eke out the overtime win.

"I worry about everything," Matheny said. "Coming off of that victory, I was concerned going into Friday's practice that there'd be too much giddiness and not enough preparation. I thought our guys prepared pretty well. I did not see signs of fatigue. I thought our guys played really hard."

Elon started the UMass game in a hole, 7-0, after an alley-oop in the opening seconds sparked some Minutemen momentum. But the Phoenix did not give in, cutting the defi-

cit to as few as seven points multiple times the final minutes.

"You just have to stay focused," Koch said after the game. "We came back and made it a close game. We want to be a team that punches the other team in the mouth, and today we got punched."

Elon has come a long way since dropping 114 points on Division III Washington Lee University to open the season in November. Through setbacks to teams like Canis College and Division II Metro State University, Matheny has said that the team is growing and taking things one day at a time.

Big-name opponents the Phoenix faced this year include No. 21 University of Colorado, Georgetown University, North Carolina State University and now No. 15 UMass. Elon lost all four of those games, but Troutman acknowledged that there's more to basketball than just winning and losing when you play teams like that.

"We went into those games to accomplish something and that was to get better," Troutman said. "That was to make ourselves better for conference play which is what matters. It's great playing those big teams, but even though we weren't able to pull anything out of it, we were able to pull stuff out of it. That's going to help us with the conference and us in the next couple years."

With preseason aspirations of winning the SoCon and reaching the NCAA Tournament in mind, taking something out of every game is vital to Elon's success. Whether perfecting the motion offense or getting one extra loose ball, the Phoenix hopes every improvement will show down the road in March.



CAROLINE OLNEY | Photo Editor

Elon beat Davidson on the road for the first time since entering the Division I ranks.

Recap of recent games

Davidson

Final Score: Elon 87, Davidson 85 - OT

Field Goal Pct.: Elon 50.7%, Davidson 43.4%

Leading scorers: Elon - Troutman 28 pts., Davidson - Brooks 28 pts.

UMass

Final Score: UMass 84, Elon 74

Field Goal Pct.: UMass 46.6%, Elon 34.4%

Leading scorers: UMass - Lalanne 23, Elon - Troutman 19