

Elon's win streak sets stage for SoCon success

Kyle Maher
Senior Reporter

As the Elon University softball team entered the grind of Southern Conference play with a weekend series against Western Carolina University March 14, the team was 16-5-1, and beginning to gain chemistry.

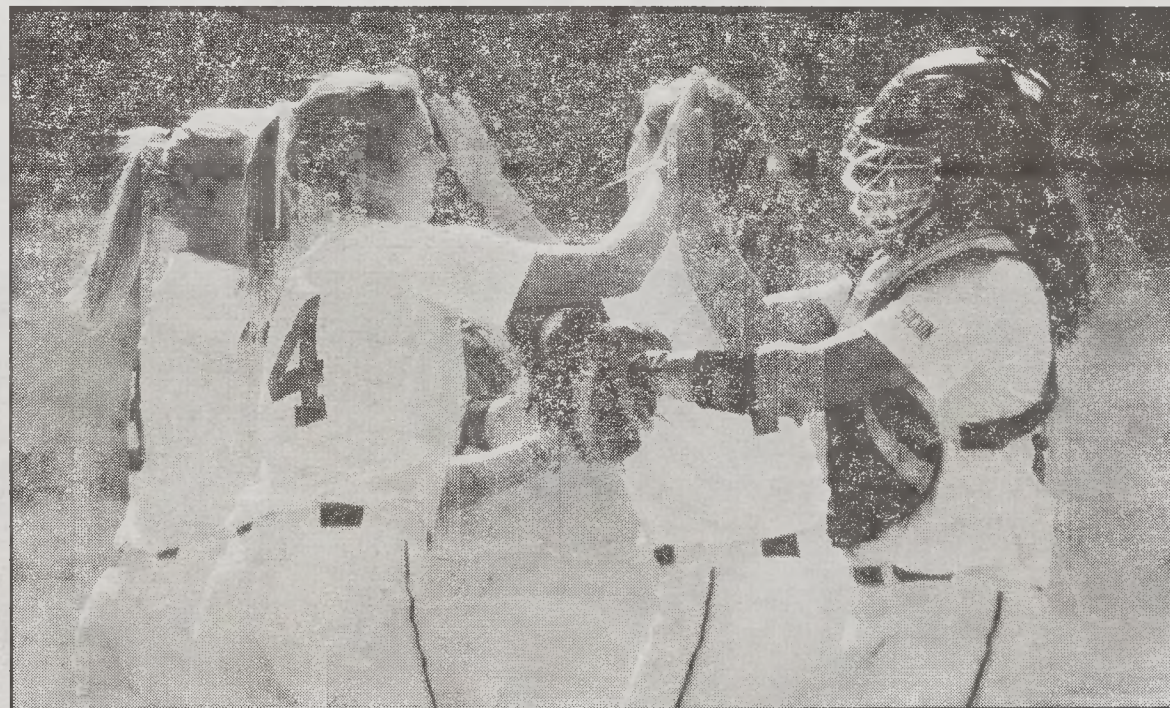
The Phoenix was on a seven-game winning streak and had dominated its two home tournaments to the tune of a combined 7-1 record when it was brought back to reality with a 5-0 loss to Syracuse University. The loss allowed the Phoenix to regroup and re-focus for their series against the Catamounts.

The Phoenix began play in a Southern Conference that, as head coach Kathy Bocock said, is the strongest it's been in recent memory, with several teams having a realistic shot at winning the title.

"This conference is going to be strong, top to bottom," Bocock said. "We can't relax and think we're going to cruise through a weekend, because that's not going to work."

The Phoenix went to Cullowhee, N.C. to face Western Carolina, and although it didn't win the series — Elon lost two of three games — the Phoenix took away a bevy of positive signs from its tough weekend. Chief among them is the experience the underclassmen gained in their first games in a hostile atmosphere against a talented conference foe.

"It was like the young kids hadn't played any games yet because they were all really nervous," Bocock said. "They know now that this is what a SoCon game on the road is going to be like. They thought they had adjusted to the college game, but conference games are



The Elon softball team will build off a recent seven-game winning streak to succeed in SoCon play.

FILE PHOTO BY JANE SEIDEL

a whole new adjustment."

Senior second baseman Lauren Oldham said it was the perfect opportunity for her and her teammates to see where they stood at this point in the season and what they still

should take credit for that. In fact, Jack is a better basketball player and a better person than I ever was or ever will be. I can take no credit. Only his mother can compete with him on the "good person" side.

For all of this I am thankful to God. But my intention here is to express to the entire Elon University community my deepest gratitude for the way in which you have conducted your affairs. Because of the way you approach every aspect of the Elon experience, our son has benefitted in ways too numerous to count. The Elon University community has a passion for its mission that is palpable. You can feel it when you walk onto campus for the first time. You can see it in the eyes and smiles of its people. You can sense it in the words of those that are responsible for its future (and its past). You can swim in the

need to improve upon.

"We struggled offensively," she said. "We were putting the ball in play and getting our hits, but we couldn't string anything together. So we need to go back to our mentality that gave us so much confidence earlier this sea-

son."

It's difficult to start the conference slate with two straight road series — Elon's next opponent is Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Ga., starting March 22 — but it's

stream of politeness and graciousness that flows from a student body that seems mature beyond its years. You can predict with confidence the future success of the school and its students.

I would like to thank every single person that has reached out to Jack during his undergraduate days. And to so many of you who have said to us, "We're so glad Jack is here at Elon." What could make a parent beam more than that? Only the realization that the words were in fact true. Only the understanding that Elon has given our family more than we could ever give it back in return.

Maybe it's the fact that Jack had the college experience I always wanted for myself but didn't find. Maybe it's the fact that I could escape the trials of the real world and lose myself in following Elon basketball. Maybe

more experience for the underclassmen to grow, develop and become more comfortable in road settings.

"I think it's actually better to have two conference road series under our belts," Oldham said. "All our nerves will be gone, and we'll be able to handle road crowds better by the time we get home and get some of our losses back."

Bocock said she sees the benefits in playing early-season conference road games, difficult as they may be for a young, inexperienced team.

"It's tough," Bocock said. "You may not get a lot of wins early on, and you hope that doesn't go against your confidence, but you do what you can and pick up a win here and there and before you go home and level the playing field and recover some wins."

The Phoenix knows it will be difficult to win the conference given the quality of depth from top to bottom in the league. But it can find the motivation necessary to get the job done in the low expectations of the league's other coaches and media personnel, who picked them to finish seventh out of eight teams in January's preseason poll.

"Our ranking is in the back of all of our minds," Oldham said. "It's definitely given us a little bit of a chip on our shoulder and motivated us to go out every day and work a little harder to prove people wrong."

it's the fact that our kid got a free education while getting to play my favorite sport on the best of stages.

No — those things, while true, are all about me.

This is all about you. You, the Elon University community. You were the "apex of special" much in advance of our son's arrival. I just felt compelled to tell you that I realize it and thank you from the bottom of my heart for it.

And in closing, I hope that this letter might also reach some of those who haven't been so blessed to understand what an honor it is to be associated with the Elon University Community.

All the best to you,
Phil Isenbarger

An open letter to the Elon University community:

Just four years ago, you accepted our son Jack Isenbarger as a student athlete at Elon University. There are too many people to thank and not enough space here to complete my thoughts. The coaching staff, administration, student body, teachers, advisors, friends and supporters deserve mention by more specific names, but you know who you are. You are the people that have surrounded our son and family with love, support, encouragement, direction, hope and praise.

So many of you have said to me in one form or another, "Jack is a wonderful basketball player, but he is an even better person." You have commented that we, as parents,