

Elon shuffles pitching rotation

Tommy Hamzik
Sports Editor

Offense hasn't been much of a problem as of late for the Elon University baseball team. The Phoenix is hitting .272 as a team and averaging nearly six runs per game.

But the pitching staff is still finding itself because of some recent changes in the starting rotation.

Elon used a weekend rotation of junior Lucas Bakker on Friday, sophomore Michael Elefante on Saturday and junior Jake Stalzer on Sunday. But both Elefante and Stalzer were replaced in past weekends.

Stalzer didn't pitch in a weekend series against Wofford College April 11-13 but came back the next weekend and tossed eight innings against Appalachian State University April 20 to pick up the win.

On April 26 against the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, freshman Matt Harris started in place of Elefante.

"It's not so much a shake-up, but just where we are in the league right now," Elon head coach Mike Kennedy said. "We're trying to get ready for the [Southern Conference] Tournament. We have to get some guys some innings."

It ended up being a reversal of roles, as Harris lasted just two innings in which he allowed six runs on nine hits. Elefante then came on in relief of Harris in the third and lasted five innings.

Harris has made 14 appearances this year, including four starts. Prior to the game against UNCG, he hadn't started a game since March 10.

"We have to stretch him out," Kennedy said. "That's the biggest reason we're doing

that. If he's going to pitch in the conference tournament and be a factor, we can't count on him in May to pitch seven or eight innings when he's thrown three at the max."

Elon has started a number of different players during its midweek games as well. Sophomore Tyler Manez seemed to be Elon's go-to midweek starter early in the year, but is 1-3 and has lasted more than five innings just once in his five starts.

Freshmen Graham Edwards, Dimitri Lettas and Mike Krill all performed well out of the bullpen to start the year, leading Kennedy to throw them into the starter's role. Edwards and Krill both failed to reach the third inning in their starts, allowing a combined eight runs on nine hits in 3.2 innings of work.

Lettas threw 6.1 scoreless innings of re-

lief against Wake Forest University March 26, prompting Kennedy to start him the following week against North Carolina A&T State University. He continued to excel, going six innings and allowing just two hits. His hot streak ended April 13 when he was taken out after 2.1 innings in a start at Wofford.

With two losses at UNCG and some discouraging signs on the mound hanging over his head, Kennedy said he'll do whatever it takes to set his team up for a good seed in next month's SoCon Tournament.

"It puts you in a tough spot in the conference," Kennedy said. "We want to finish as high as we can. We're going to go out there and throw our best guys."

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Three-headed attack leading Phoenix offense

Kyle Maher
Senior Reporter

Softball is a team game, and everyone on the Elon University softball team has made contributions to the team's success. But three players — sophomore Emily Cameron, senior Carleigh Nester and freshman Alaina Hall — have shouldered the large majority of the offensive load.

Elon's "Big Three" have scored 90 of the team's 193 runs and contributed 75 of Elon's 183 RBIs.

To see just how much these three are relied upon to generate offense, look no further than the gap between Nester — who has the lowest batting average of the three at .306 — and the team's role players, the best of whom is hitting .245.

"They bring so much to the table," Elon head coach Kathy Bocock said. "Other teams know about them and their impact on our offense and they focus on them, which gives the other young ladies a chance to step up."

Hall said she feeds off Nester and Cameron's success because it motivates her to up

her game to match their performance.

"They motivate me to be better every day," Hall said. "When they get a hit, I want to get a hit. It's just the way I am. I'm a competitor. I want to be the best, and playing with Carleigh and [Cameron] will help me get there."

Individually, Hall has been enormously productive for a player in her first year at the collegiate level. She has the team's highest batting average at .354 and has 51 hits on the season. She's also driven in 13 runs and has three home runs under her belt.

Her production, Nester said, has been anything but surprising given the poise and maturity she's shown as a true freshman.

"She picks up on things that other people don't, things that other people miss," Nester said. "She's so dedicated to her game and to improving that she was bound to have success right away."

Cameron is hitting .320, has seven home runs and 23 RBIs. She leads the team with an on-base percentage of .406, and is second on the team with a .516 slugging percentage.

Her bat, Hall said, is vital to the Elon's

lineup, because she brings run-producing power bat to the middle of the order.

"If she's on, if she's hitting well, then there aren't too many hitters who can match her production," Hall said. "She's capable of carrying our offense by herself if she has to."

Nester, the only upperclassman of the three, is hitting .306, is second on the team in hits with 44 and leads the team with 13 home runs and a slugging percentage of .660.

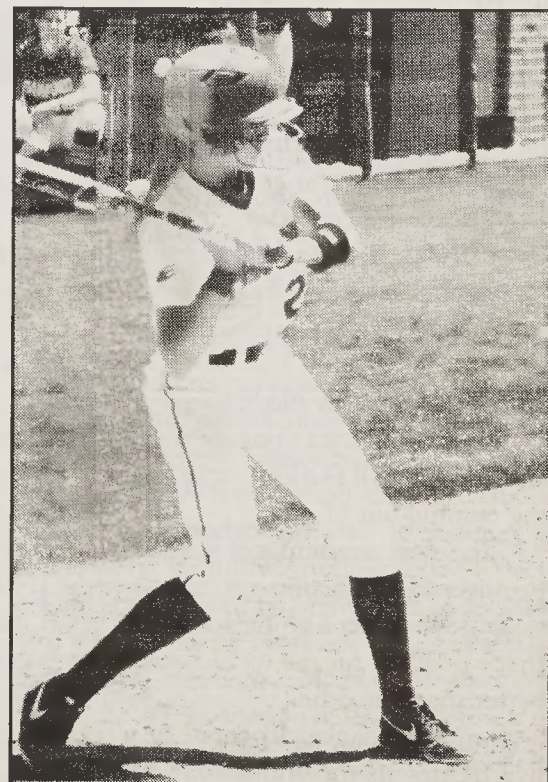
Hall said Nester always "comes through in the clutch."

"Carleigh's our leader," Hall said. "She's who we turn to for the big hit in the big moment with the game on the line because she always delivers the hit we need. It makes the rest of us want to match her success and be able to deliver if we ever are up in that situation."

With the Southern Conference tournament looming, the Phoenix expects its big hitters to continue being catalysts of an offense that struggles without their consistent production.

If Hall, Cameron and Nester are able to stay hot and lead the team on a late-season

run, the Phoenix could find the momentum necessary to make a late push for a bid to the NCAA tournament.



ASHLEY KING | Staff Photographer
Sophomore Emily Cameron's .320 batting average has helped carry the Elon softball team in the 2014 season.