

# Elon men off to best start in D1 era

Phoenix sweeps NIU Thanksgiving Classic, starts year 5-1

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Senior guard Luke Eddy was a sophomore when the Elon University men's basketball team played in a Thanksgiving tournament in Cancun, Mexico in 2014, a trip he called "absolutely amazing."

But this past week, the team spent six days in Dekalb, Illinois. Though rural Illinois is a less exciting destination than Cancun, this trip ended with the Phoenix winning Northern Illinois University's NIU Thanksgiving Classic.

"This one was very unique," Eddy said. "I like anywhere that we go 3-0 at, I'll tell you that."

The tournament win was Elon's first since winning the Maui Invitational mainland tournament in 2012. It also gives Elon its best start to a season since 1987-1988, when the then-Fightin' Christians played in the NIAA and started the season with six straight wins.

**The NIU Thanksgiving Classic was Elon's first tournament victory since winning the Maui Invitational mainland tournament in 2012.**

The strong start also garnered some national attention, as CollegeInsider.com ranked Elon 23rd in its weekly Mid-Major Poll, a ranking of the top teams from outside the major conferences. It's the first time since Feb. 4, 2013, that Elon has been ranked in CollegeInsider.com's poll — before anyone on the team currently was on campus.

The four-team NIU Thanksgiving Classic tournament was played round-robin style, with each team facing each other once. Each Elon win featured different set of challenges and styles of play, which Matheny was happy to see.



Sophomore forward Tyler Seibring (1) was named CAA Player of the Week Nov. 28.

JACK HARTMANN | Staff Photographer

"It's pleasing that we were able to win against different fashions and against different styles of play," Matheny said. "To do it in a tournament format with very little preparation time is another thing we can build on. We won close games, we got better from the experience. There's still room for improvement, but it's something we can build on."

Eddy, who was named Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) Player of the Week Monday for his play in the tournament, also believed that the team, "maintained the highs and the lows — [they] kept steady and ran [their] system."

The Phoenix started the tournament by jumping out to a double-digit lead against the University of Illinois-Chicago and led by as much as 21 points in a 91-80 win Nov. 23. Sophomore point guard Dainan Swoope led the Phoenix with a career-high 26 points off the bench, and redshirt junior forward Brian Dawkins added a career-high 19 points.

Then, after taking Thursday off for the holiday, Elon battled Northern Illinois into double overtime before pulling out an 85-80

victory Nov. 25. It was the first two-overtime game Elon had played in since Feb. 2, 2012, when Elon beat the College of Charleston. Sophomore guard Steven Santa Ana had a team-high 20 points.

Then Eddy took over Saturday against California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo Nov. 26, shooting a perfect 6-for-6 from the field with four 3-pointers and going 9-of-10 at the free throw line for 25 points. Elon was down by 11 midway through the first half, but stormed back to win 72-66.

The team's offensive capabilities were as strong as ever, with six different players scoring double-digit points during the tournament. Matheny was impressed when he heard about the distribution of scoring.

"I think it shows that we're a balanced scoring team," Matheny said. "We've always run an equal-opportunity offense as a motion offense, but this year, we've got several guys that can score. I think more guys are understanding where shots come from in our offense, and in turn, it should make us more difficult to guard."

Eddy added, "We're a very talented offensive team. We have so many options that it's tricky to decide who to put your best defender on. We can go to our second, third or fourth guy, and if one guy is hot, we can ride him. If another guy is not hot, we still trust them to make their shot."

"Trust is a big thing — if somebody is shooting a three on this team, I believe they can make it. I believe anybody that we play can make a 3-point shot."

In the next week, Elon hosts two teams it beat on the road last season. The Phoenix beat Florida International University 77-71 last year and plays the Panthers at 7 p.m. Nov. 30. Then the University of North Carolina at Asheville, who Elon beat 86-81 last year, comes to town Dec. 6. While some may expect Elon to beat these teams, Matheny cautions against assuming victories.

"We won at [the University of North Carolina at] Charlotte, and they came in here and beat us," Matheny said, referencing Elon's lone loss of the season. "We just have to do what we always do and focus on the here and now. We played a really close game at FIU last year, and we had to score a lot of points in round 10 to come out with a victory. We know it's going to be a tough game."

In between the last two home games before the semester ends, Elon will take a quick road trip to Washington D.C. to face perennial power Georgetown University at 1:30 p.m. Dec. 4. The Hoyas finished under .500 last year and currently stand at 3-4 for the 2016-17 season, making this as good of a chance as any to take down a traditional power.

But regardless of the results that come in the run-up to conference play, both Matheny and Eddy see the short burst of success and know there is improvement still to be had.

"The run's great, and we've got a little buzz to it, which I think we deserve it," Eddy said. "But we've got to remember that four straight games is not going to win you one game in the CAA. We've just got to come out every day and just get better, work on what we do well and what we miscued in the game."

## FOOTBALL

### RESULTS



Nov. 19  
14-63



## THE PHOENIX FOCUS

## MEN'S BASKETBALL

### RESULTS & SCHEDULE



Nov. 17  
74-61



Nov. 25  
85-80



Nov. 23  
91-80



Nov. 26  
72-66



Home

Nov. 30  
7 p.m.



Away

Dec. 4  
1:30 p.m.



Home

Dec. 6  
7 p.m.



## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

### RESULTS & SCHEDULE



Nov. 18  
76-55



Nov. 19  
71-57



Nov. 22  
64-58



Nov. 26  
68-78



Away

Dec. 4  
5:30 p.m.

