



ASHLEY KING | Staff Photographer  
Freshman quarterback  
Jalen Green runs the  
ball during the annual  
Spring game March 29.

## SPRINGING TOWARD THE FALL

Phoenix ends spring scrimmage schedule with newfound intensity

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The Elon University football team concluded its final spring scrimmage on a hot and humid Saturday afternoon with 20 40-yard sprints.

Midway through the scrimmage, new head coach Curt Cignetti stopped the players and gathered them for a quick kneel-down before colorfully yelling at his team for their effort.

It's a part of the new level of intensity the former University of Alabama wide receiver coach has tried to bring to the Elon football team, which is coming off a disappointing 2-9 season.

"He was just telling us if we want to change the culture around here, we have to change what we do right now," junior offensive lineman Alex Higgins said. "We have to do those sprints after practice to make sure we can finish in the fourth quarter."

The scrimmage displayed some noteworthy competition at the quarterback position. The Phoenix's former No. 1 and No. 2 on the depth chart — juniors Connor Christiansen, who has since moved to safety, and Daniel Thompson — have been replaced with early freshmen enrollees.

**Two young quarterbacks compete for the starting spot in the fall.**



The Phoenix looks to use a strong run game behind new quarterback choice.

New gunslingers Davis Cheek and Jalen Greene battled for a chance to lead the Phoenix in the fall, though the spring game offered no clear-cut favorite. Greene opened up the scrimmage with a 55-yard touchdown run and had some impressive longer throws to receivers throughout the game.

Greene saw success on multiple short, intermediate throws as well, but he also had a couple of fumbles on read handoffs to running backs.

Cheek, who has only participated in five of the 12 practices due to sickness, delivered some high intensity throws down the middle of the field. He hit sophomore receiver Tre Marsh for a 32-yard touchdown and added a short running touchdown of his own.

"I thought both quarterbacks did good things," Cignetti said. "I thought Jalen had a really good scrimmage and Davis really picked it up as the

scrimmage got going and made a few throws. They both had terrific springs. I'm glad they're here enrolled early. We've got a nice situation at quarterback."

Meanwhile, on the ground, the Phoenix look to be in good shape.

The team will enter fall practice with a new starting tailback. Redshirt freshman Brelynd Cyphers has the edge over junior running back Malcolm Summers, according to Cignetti. But Summers did have an 84-yard run from inside his own 5-yard line and a 38-yard scamper.

The success and failure of Cyphers and Summers will perhaps be a strong indicator of how Elon performs this season with its new offense. Coach Cignetti has preached a "pound the rock" approach with an emphasis on the run game.

It's an approach that Higgins said the offensive line has taken a liking to.

"I frickin' love it," he said with a smile.

As for the team's goals heading into summer before fall camp begins, Higgins and fellow offensive lineman junior CJ Toogood said it all starts in the weight room.

"We need to just trust in our strength coach and get bigger, stronger, faster over the summer," Toogood said. "We don't need to catch up going into camp; we just need to take another step forward like we did for spring ball."

"We just have to stay in the film room, get everyone to learn their plays and focus on technique," Higgins added. "The weight room is going to be big for us this summer."

The necessary constant improvement will be something to note going forward, with an Elon team going through a regime change. The Phoenix have not had to make too many adjustments strategically, but the mindset has been a clear medium of focus for Cignetti.

Higgins mentioned that the difference in intensity has already been "through the roof," but this fall will be a true indicator of the team's progress as it begins regular season play Aug. 31 in Ohio at the University of Toledo.

"We're making progress as a team," Cignetti said. "We're making progress in terms of our toughness, our tempo, our physicality; we're finishing better, we're executing better. We've still got some holes that we have to fill, but we have a long way to go yet. But we're a lot further along than when we started."