



NEW MAN ON CAMPUS

Mike Ward, Elon's new deputy athletics director, watches the Elon University football team win its fifth-straight game, defeating William & Mary 25-17 on Saturday Oct. 7.

ALEC MANDRELL | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Phoenix hires new deputy athletics director

Erik Webb
Sports Director | @ErikWebbElon

ELON UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS DIRECTOR Dave Blank announced last month that he would be adding a new position to his staff the same time he announced who would be filling the role.

Mike Ward was named the deputy athletics director for Elon University Sept. 18. With his background, it might be surprising to sports fans why he made the move to Elon.

Ward came to Elon from large Southeastern Conference (SEC) schools. Most recently, Ward was at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville where he served as the senior associate athletic director for sport programs and administration. Prior to that, he was the associate athletics director for compliance and administration at the University of Alabama. Ward said there was a driving factor that made him want to move from an SEC school to a Colonial Athletic Association school like Elon.

"They are all different, but they are all the same size, and they are all run the same way," Ward said. "Elon gave me a chance to continue to grow by going some place that maybe looks a little bit different than those schools, but has a lot of the same goals ... really, it gave me a chance to come in and contribute to the vision and the mission."

"Ward brings broad and successful experience across a wide array of areas to Elon Athletics," Blank said in a press release. "He is a talented, results-oriented administrator."

Ward's goals

On a daily basis, Ward is unsure what his role will be within the athletics department.

"I think it will evolve over time, and it will be a slow start," he said. "It's a new position here and really, best-case scenario, I'll allow Dave to work at a much higher level while managing the day-to-day details of running the department so he spend more time creating the vision for Elon Athletics. I hope to find ways to contribute to the student and the day-to-day experiences that our student athletes have."

"Mike shares Elon's commitment of cre-

ating a well-rounded experience for our student-athletes and I am confident he will have a positive impact across our department," Blank said.

As he looks to leave a lasting impression on Elon, Ward says he wants to develop a bigger fan base.

"I think we've got to continue to get better at telling our story as an athletics department and as a Division I program," Ward said. "I think we've got to tell the story of how we continue to add value to the region about how our entertainment experiences here are a great experience for people who live here in the region."

According to Ward, that not only starts with the residents of Alamance County, but also with the students at Elon, too.

"I want to help fill that gap with the current generation of Phoenix Fanatics and their leadership, and figure out what we, as a

active in making changes. I want to be a really active listener for a little while and see how we do things before we start to modify anything."

Favorite things

Having only been at Elon for a couple weeks, Ward says he's already impressed.

"This campus is gorgeous," he said. "I'm a runner, and every night I run around campus and feel like I find a new sidewalk or a new lake or some part of campus that is just stunningly well-kept. To get to experience this every day while you're here getting your education, to have things like College Coffee every Tuesday ... this is like Disneyland for college students."

After experiencing his first College Coffee last week, Ward said he is really appreciative of all of the student experiences available



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department, can do to support them," Ward said. "Do they want us to support them with themed nights? With particular music? With a curtain of distraction? All of those things, which have to be student led to be authentic, I think my job is to pull that out of them."

Ward not only believes in the ability to get bigger attendance numbers, but also believes in the Phoenix, and his goals reflect that.

"We're going to think big, but start small," Ward said. "Our goal, and my goal, is to graduate every student athlete and win every championship. Those are audacious goals, but if you set them any lower I think would be a disservice to the caliber of student athletes we're bringing into the program."

Even though he believes that winning every championship each year is unrealistic, Ward says he's excited to try to bring the Phoenix to that level.

"I'm excited to see what we do," he said. "I think for the first couple of months, the difficult part is resist the urge to be overly

and would love to be able to show them off.

"I'd love to have a recruit here on a Tuesday morning for College Coffee and particularly a recruit's parents. It's an amazing experience ... I saw people from every different area of campus. I saw the head basketball coach out there at College Coffee mingling with students. College Coffee is a very unique tradition and a pretty special thing that the university continues to invest in things like that."

One student experience that Ward is really amazed by is the hands-on work students do for the athletics department on a daily basis.

"I've probably learned more about the caliber of students at Elon through the students who are helping interface with athletics," he said. "Our game production is almost entirely student run. It's really good. Being able to see what students can do, what the students in the communications school are capable of, they're leaving with really hands-

on training."

When it comes to athletics, Ward says picking what sport is his favorite is like trying to pick between his children.

"I think we have two incredibly talented basketball coaches of our basketball program, so I'm excited to see them," Ward said. "I've never been at a school with Division I lacrosse, and so really excited about that. Love softball and baseball; great way to spend an afternoon on a spring day."

Though he might not be able to pick his favorite, coming from SEC schools has Ward excited about one sport in particular.

"Football is important and football is visible, so I think that's been very exciting," Ward said. "I worked with Coach Cignetti at Alabama and know what he's capable of. He's a great coach. So part of what my job will be is to tell people what to expect from him and that's a level of competitiveness that I think you're seeing in our team this year."

Ward isn't wrong. After a win this weekend, the Elon football team starts their season 5-1.

Personal notes

Ward completed his undergrad at the University of Alabama, where he graduated cum laude in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in biology and psychology. He stayed at Alabama for another three years and earned a Juris Doctor degree with a concentration in business administration from the University of Alabama School of Law.

After working as a lawyer, working for the NCAA as the assistant director of enforcement, and working at the University of Oklahoma, the University of Alabama and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Ward was ready for a change. He said that he came to North Carolina for a multitude of reasons.

"I look at, you know, the livability of a place, the culture of the department, the opportunity and the leadership here, and those are what really attracted me to Elon," he said.

Livability is important to Ward as he makes sure his two children will also be happy with the move. Ward and his wife, Beth, have two children - Xander is 14 and Avalyn is 13.

"They will make the move next Friday, and they're excited," Ward said. "I think they are excited about the community. Looking forward to them getting here and showing them everything that this place has to offer."