



NEW YEAR, NEW FACES

Elon looks to repeat as Colonial Athletic Association champ with six new players

Erik Webb
Sports Director | @ErikWebbElon

Coming off a Colonial Athletic Association conference title and an appearance in the NCAA tournament, the Elon University women's basketball program begins a new season in Alumni Gym.

NEW ADDITIONS

Elon's Women's basketball team welcomes six freshmen this season, making half of the team newcomers.

preparation has been going at a slow pace.

"I'm comfortable with it because we talked about trying to acclimate the freshmen to our system," Smith said. "Just taking it slow and moving at a pace where they can get an understanding and be really good at a few things ... I feel like it's going really well and so I'm excited about where we are right now."

A new season means a new look for the Phoenix. Elon welcomes six freshmen this season. They include guard Ariel Colon, forward Emily Maupin, guard Saadia Munford, guard Ariana Nance, forward Anna Popovic and forward Jaylin Powell. With half the team being newcomers, senior center and team captain

Malaya Johnson said she is ready for this year.

"Six freshmen is really a whole lot of new opportunities," Johnson said. "It's a time to really step up and lead by example; but they work really hard and are excited, so honestly, it's just fresh feet. They're ready to go."

"It's a lot of teaching ... a lot of breakdown," Smith said. "Simplifying the package. You will probably hear me say that quite a bit. That's something that we try to do ... simplify things so that they can master just a few things and be really good at it."

THE YEAR AHEAD

Elon opens play in an exhibition match against the Anderson University Trojans Nov. 5. The Phoenix will play two home and two away matches before Thanksgiving before playing a slew of teams from North Carolina. They will also play against Wake Forest University and North Carolina State University, at the beginning of the following month.

For Smith, there is one game that she is most excited for.

"The game opener ... I'm ready to play," Smith said. "I think once we get into the season, and just that first game, will take the monkey off of everyone's back and you know, hopefully we can relax and just flow into the season and play Elon basketball. I'm really excited because we continue to play a great brand of basketball. Exciting, up-tempo ... so I think it will be another great year."

The top scorer from last season was senior Shay Burnett, named the CAA Preseason Player of the Year. Burnett scored

419 points for the Phoenix, averaging 12.3 per game. She also averaged 7.3 rebounds and 4.6 assists.

Elon returns six players from last year including senior guard Burnett, senior forward Meme Garner, sophomore guard Jada Graves, Johnson, sophomore guard Lexi Mercer and sophomore center Ra'Shika White. Two of the top three Phoenix scorers from last season, Lauren Brown and Jenifer Rhodes, graduated in May. To continue success from last season, Smith says the thing they have to do is take it day-by-day.

"Just try to be the best we can be on that given day," Smith said. "In my eyes, I feel like if we develop them to be the best they can be and we compete to our highest potential, whether that leads to a championship ... I don't know. To me that's success and I feel like our coaching staff is doing a really good job of teaching our freshmen. So we'll just let the chips fall where they may once the season starts."

"Expectations are really just come at the season with the same mindset that we did last season," Johnson said.

Johnson also outlined some of the goals that the team has for the 2017-2018 season.

"As a team, just come at every game with a sense of urgency. We always talk about having fun because when you're not having fun with it, then what are you re-

ally doing?"

SMITH'S THOUGHTS

The Phoenix's exhibition game against Anderson University marks the first game of the final season inside Alumni Gym before Elon moves its basketball program to the new Schar Center, which is under construction. "It's going to be awesome," Smith said. "We're going to play the last game here that will ever be played in Alumni, so I'm projecting that by that point in the season we're sharp, we're where we want to be in terms of a team and we'll put on a good showing to close out Alumni Gym."

The head coach wants to make sure that the team is held to a high regard when it comes to the final season.

"I'll just talk about excellence and trying to commit to doing everything out here on the court and off the court with excellence," she said. "Every year we shoot to be championship teams. We've done that for seven years in a row. For six years we weren't champions and that's our goal every year ... it never changes. So, I think in order to be a champion, you've got to talk about being a champion. And I've talked about being a champion since 2011, and I'll continue to talk about that."

The quest to being that championship starts with the game against the Trojans on Nov. 5. Tip off for is scheduled for 5:30 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17 RECORD

	OVERALL	HOME	AWAY	NEUTRAL
ALL GAMES	27-7	12-2	11-4	4-1
CONFERENCE	15-2	7-1	8-1	0-0
NON-CONFERENCE	12-5	5-1	3-3	4-1

2016-17 STATS

893 PEOPLE
Average attendance per game

27 WINS
Most wins in Division I era and second-most wins in a season in school history

70.6 PPG
New school record in Division I era

2399 POINTS
New school record in Division I era