

## THE WORLD'S GAME



ZACHARY OHMANN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior forward Iñigo Bronte stands in line with his teammates for the national anthem before their match against UNC Charlotte on Sept. 11, 2018. The Phoenix lost to the 49ers 4-0.

Iñigo Bronte is taking on the United States with style as new Elon men's soccer forward

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**H**OME MATCHES FOR JUNIOR forward Iñigo Bronte of Elon University's men's soccer team look a bit different than they did last year. The almost 15-hour flight from his home in Pamplona, Spain, is all that separates Bronte from his old life. But the distance isn't the only thing that has changed for him. This entire experience at Elon and on Elon's soccer team is one that he is still adjusting to.

Bronte hails from the land most famous for its running of the bulls. People line the 957-yard path to watch the bulls thrash their way into the town's bullring, clad in white and red.

Bronte played a bullring of his own in the past few years. Before coming to Elon as a redshirt junior, Bronte played under the lights of Estadio Ripagaina for fourth-tier Spanish soccer team UCD Burlades.

The forward found his way to Elon in a much more hurried fashion than most normally do. Many recruits will start the process years in advance, sometimes as early as their sophomore year of high school when they are 16 years old. Bronte did not have the luxury of time in his process getting to North Carolina.

"It was a very intense process for me because I started the process in late June," Bronte said. Pair the late start with a work schedule and the time difference between Spain and the United States, and Bronte's process to join the club became a stressful one.

The differences are becoming apparent to Bronte, who is now seven games into his Elon career. For one, Bronte is playing with much younger competition this year than he has in a long time.

"In Spain, I played the last years with adults, something that changes the game completely," Bronte said.

Another major change Bronte has seen is how he has a lot less time this year to make an impact on the club. Not only is he coming in halfway through college, but he



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Junior forward Iñigo Bronte plots his next move against UNC Charlotte on Sept. 11, 2018.

is also seeing a severe cut in the length of the season. In Spain, Bronte had a 42-game season to help his team find a way into the postseason. Now with the Phoenix, Bronte will have less than half that — just 17 games — to try and make their way into the postseason.

So far, Bronte has proved up to the task. The forward leads the team in almost every major offensive category, including points, shots, goals, shots on goal and game-winning goals. Bronte has been averaging almost 3.5 shots per game through the first seven games of his first season with this new squad.

Bronte's brilliance was on display when the team traveled north on Interstate 95 to visit the Scarlet Knights of Rutgers University. Bronte showed his world-class ability by scoring the opening three goals of the

match and added an assist in the Phoenix 8-1 dismantling of the home side. Bronte needed just 28 minutes to score a hat trick in the match. His first goal found the back of the net from a seemingly impossible scoring position near midfield. The Rutgers goalkeeper was caught off his line and Bronte snuck his shot in below the crossbar to give the Phoenix a 1-0 lead in that match.

Though Bronte is playing well, that doesn't mean he hasn't faced challenges adjusting to life in the United States. The game itself is played much differently for starters. "The style is completely different," Bronte said. "Substitutions change everything." In the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA), a player can substitute off and back on to the pitch during the game. In Bronte's previous league, once a player is subbed off, they

cannot come back on for the remainder of the match.

Bronte also noted the style of play is different. "In Spain, games were much more tactical and a little less rhythmic in some facets of the game," Bronte said. "We played with much more control of the ball and therefore a lot less chances."

Even though it may be hard to see it at times, life is more than just sports. Coming to Elon was an entire upheaval of what Bronte has known his entire life. The change in soccer play may be different to him in the United States, but none of that compares to the lifestyle changes that Bronte is facing.

Bronte said being an athlete has given him a lot of confidence and has been very helpful in his transition to college life and life in the United States. "We move in a month before everyone than the rest of the students, so I have had more time getting used to everything," Bronte said.

Things like food, culture, lifestyle and language are things a lot of college students take for granted when going to college. But those are all things the Spain native had to adjust to while preparing for the fall athletic schedule.

One of the biggest adjustments is something that is quite common for many students. Bronte was used to a close-knit community at home, something he feels is not the same in the United States.

"In Spain, relations were much closer than here; people tend to do more things together. I am used to spending more time with my family and friends in the streets, hanging out, watching games together," Bronte said. "This is probably what I miss the most, but I'm very happy with how things are going here for the moment."

The team simulates some of that closeness that Bronte is missing from home, however nothing can replace family. But Bronte is not alone on the team. 14 of the squad's 33 players are international students, making it one of the school's most diverse teams.

Bronte has gotten his feet underneath himself and shown that he is a force on the team. All the moving parts he had to deal with have made his performance on the pitch just that much more impressive. Bronte's ability to translate the World's Game to the pitch in United States is a testament to the grit and grind that has made him an integral part of Elon's squad this year.

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