

Ready to defy expectations: Men's basketball preview

Picked to finish eighth in the CAA, Elon is ready to prove people wrong

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Last year, after going 14-18 (6-12 CAA), Elon University men's basketball begins its first year playing in Schar Center. The Phoenix is predicted to finish eighth in the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) this season.

Leading up to the season

The Phoenix graduated five seniors, one of them being redshirt-senior Brian Dawkins. The other seniors were Dmitri Thompson, Collin Luther, Jack Anton and Jack George. Dawkins was one of Elon's most efficient shooters and rebounders. Thompson has continued his basketball career in Lebanon, playing for BC Atlas Al Ferzol, and Dawkins now plays for GTK Gilwice in Poland.

The Phoenix will have to look to fill the holes on offense from Dawkins and Thompson, as well as find new leadership.

The team

Elon has an experienced team full of returning starters and a veteran coaching staff poised to make im-



Freshman forward Chuck Hannah keeps the ball away from Randolph College defense in the Phoenix's exhibition game on Oct. 30.

ABBY GIBBS | PHOTO EDITOR

provements from last season. Head coach Matthew Matheny is entering his tenth season as head coach of the Phoenix and fifth in the CAA.

Matheny has led the Phoenix to a 140-148 record since his time began at Elon, and has guided the team to 14 or more victories in each of the past seven years.

Also returning this year to lead the Phoenix is senior forward Tyler Seibring. Seibring led the team last year up and down the court

in defensive rebounds and blocks on the defensive end. On the offensive end of the court, Seibring anchored the middle, leading the team in total points and offensive rebounds. But what separates Seibring from the traditional forward is his ability to generate offense outside the arc.

Alongside Seibring is senior guard Dainan Swoope. Swoope serves as the director of the offense from the backcourt. Swoope tallied 126 assists and 12 points per game last season.

Among the list of freshmen who are most likely to make an impact this season is guard Kris Wooten. In high school, Wooten was named an MVP in all three seasons he played and was also a career 1,000-pointer.

Then there's forward Chuck Hannah, who was a captain of his high school team his senior year and was involved with two of his high school's national championship runs, finishing as runner-up in both.

Italian native, forward Federico Poser, played on

the Italian U20 men's national team in the Istanbul Tournament in 2018 and was involved in a team that won a national championship, where he averaged 16.7 points that season.

Looking at the road ahead

The Phoenix started the 2018-2019 season with a win against the Manhattan College Jaspers on Tuesday, Oct. 6. The final score of the game was 62-56. The team then plays the first men's

BY THE NUMBERS

1

season above a .500 record is Elon's record since joining the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA).

62-56

was the score of Elon's first win of the 2018-2019 season against the Manhattan College Jaspers.

basketball game in Schar Center's history against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Tar Heels.

On Jan. 10, the Phoenix will host the preseason No. 1 team in the CAA, the Northeastern University Huskies. The Huskies have not lost much of a step coming into the 2018-2019 season as they are returning its top players from last year, redshirt-senior point guard Vasa Pusica and junior guard Shawn Occesus.

Northeastern, next to the College of Charleston, will be Elon's biggest test in conference play, and to beat one of them would be critical to Elon's ranking in the CAA.

Whether the Phoenix meet their preseason ranking or surpass expectations, it will be a historic first men's basketball season to open Schar Center.

Elon-UNC Preview: How David might topple Goliath

What has to happen for Elon to pull off an upset to start the season

Jack Haley
Sports Director | @jackhaley17

Elon University men's basketball kicks off their inaugural season in Schar Center this year. To

TAR HEELS' LAST SEASON

The Tar Heels finished 26-11 overall and 11-7 in Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) play.

No matter how uneven the game may seem on paper, they play every game for a reason.

Scouting the Tar Heels

Last year was a down year by the standards of some UNC fans. The Tar Heels finished 26-11 overall and 11-7 in Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) play. They entered the NCAA tournament as a No. 2 seed but bowed out early, losing handily to No. 7 seed Texas A&M University in the second round.

The Tar Heels are bringing in a major recruiting class this year. The three freshmen coming in are five-star recruits Nassir Little and Coby White, and four-star recruit Leaky Black. For some perspective, the highest rated Elon player is senior shooting guard Steven Santa

Ana, who was a three-star recruit.

The Tar Heels are led by young players, returning only two seniors: forward Luke Maye and guard Kenny Williams.

Leading UNC's team is the legendary head coach Roy Williams. Williams, now in his fifteenth season at the helm, has racked up quite the list of accolades, and it doesn't look like he's slowing down. Williams has led the Tar Heels to three national titles, has gone to six national championship games and has the second most career tournament wins of all-time with 76.

How does Elon win this game?

It would be a longshot to expect Elon to win, but you can't count them out from coming out on top. It became a reality last year for the Tar Heels when they welcomed the Wofford University Terriers to the Dean Dome and then lost to them 79-75. Crazy things happen in sports. So how does Elon get it done?

It looks like playing down low is not going to work.

Elon does not have the size to compete with the UNC big men. Guys who can generally hold their own in the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) like senior center Karolis Kundrotas, the six-foot, eleven-inch Lithuanian, and senior forward Tyler Seibring, are going to have trouble working in the low post against the UNC centers.

Elon is going to be forced to do



Left to right: Redshirt-sophomore Seth Fuller, seniors Sheldon Eberhardt, Dainan Swoope and Tyler Seibring and sophomore Simon Wright walk off the court at the 2018 CAA Tournament on March 3.

ERIC WEBB | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

what they do during lots of games — shoot the three.

If Elon can get hot from behind the three-point line, they are going to have a chance. The team is capable of making threes, and they recruit guys to be able to do so, but they need to be particularly exceptional when they play the Tar Heels.

The final thing Elon needs to do to have a prayer of pulling off an upset is to be physical. The big, strong, fast UNC players are going to make Elon work and make them

pick up the tempo of their play.

If the Phoenix really want to win this game, they need to use their possessions to slow down the tempo of the game and not take bad shots. It will probably be pretty tempting in the first half to try and take big shots while they are close with UNC, but that is the quickest way to dig themselves into a hole.

If Elon wants to win this game, they are going to need to score. They cannot win a defensive battle with the Tar Heels, but they can try and outshoot them.

BY THE NUMBERS

4-18

is Elon's all-time record against University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

100-62

was the final score of the last game between Elon and UNC in 2011.