

# WOMEN'S BASKETBALL DROPS HOME OPENER TO UNC

FINAL SCORE

**100-69**

was the final score for Elon's opening regular season game against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

pointers in the third quarter. Elon lost the services of sophomore forward Jaylin Powell just eight seconds into the half when she collided with a Tar Heel. Powell was helped off the court and returned later to sit on the bench in a sling.

Things went from bad to worse for the Phoenix in the fourth quarter. Down 32 points with just under six and a half minutes to play in the game, junior guard Jada Graves went down screaming in pain, grabbing her right knee. Though Smith may very well have just lost two of her starters in the first game of the season due to injuries, Smith is constantly focused on the end goal.

"Of course this is not what I had anticipated for our home opener, but it just goes back to what we've done all preseason: make adjustments and keep moving forward," Smith said.

Graves was helped off the court to cheers from all fans but was completely unable to put any weight on her injured leg.

"We're hoping ... Jada Graves is going to be okay. It's pretty rough out there. We've been through that, so we're just hoping she's going to be okay," said UNC head coach Sylvia Hatchell.

Elon went cold for the rest of the night, with a few spurts of offense. But after the injury, the life and energy of the team seemed to be drained.

"Overall, I felt like we played hard. We played for all 40 minutes even when we were down, so I'm very proud of my team," Smith said.

Though the scoreboard may have told a different story, Smith is optimistic that the team will take away positives from this game and get ready to make another run.

"Getting back to the championship last year was a process. When we first started out, we got off to a rough start, but we started clicking and gelling at the right time, and that's what it's all about," Smith said. "We may take some bumps and bruises early, but as long as we're clicking at the right time, we'll be fine."

Elon gets back on the court Nov. 13 against North Carolina Central University on the road. Elon then stays on the road to play Duke University on Nov. 18 and Appalachian State on Nov. 20 before returning to Schar Center to take on Chowan University on Nov. 28.

going, with freshman guard Kayla Liles hitting two layups on back-to-back possessions to reel the Tar Heels back in. But the Tar Heels were able to put some distance between the two sides. A 13-2 run in the middle of the second quarter helped UNC open up a margin as high as 16 points with a minute and a half left to play until halftime.

"We made an adjustment to come out after halftime and send two people back on defense to try and stop the transition points," said junior guard Lexi Mercer. "I think they got on a run in transition and scoring back-to-back baskets, and we got a little down on that. I think sometimes we were too worried about trying to get a rebound and we were losing our mentality to get back."

But Elon was able to hold the Tar Heels and score the last six points of the period to stay within striking distance, down just 11 at the break. The margin Elon had on rebounds quickly evaporated as they were able to corral just three missed shots in the second quarter. Maupin led the way for the Phoenix in the first half with seven points and just as many rebounds.

Elon seemed to come out flat in the second half. After UNC got their legs and began to outrun the Phoenix, it seemed as though there was no stopping them. The length of the Tar Heels became a terror on the Phoenix and forced them into bad passes and settling for perimeter shots, all while catching up on rebounding, holding the Phoenix to another five rebounds.

"We allowed too many transition points in the second half," Smith said. "That kind of hurt us, so we need to make some adjustments in terms of our transition defense."

Shots were not falling for the Phoenix in the third quarter. Elon shot 7-14 from the floor, compared to UNC converting 12-17 shots and 4-8 three

Two injuries in the first game could end Elon's season before it even starts

Jack Haley  
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Elon University's women's basketball team (0-1) was unable to start the season in style, dropping their first game of the regular season 100-69 to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1-0) on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

It was a sloppy first half between the two teams. Missed layups, bad fouls and thrown away possessions led to a not very visually appealing first period of play. Elon got on the board with their first points from a layup by sophomore forward Emily Maupin, who drew a foul but was unable to convert the one-and-one play. Despite a distinct size differential, Elon did not seem deterred by the towering UNC players. Elon more than doubled the rebounding total of the Tar Heels 21-10 in the first quarter. Creating the most out of their opportunities and using some quick moves, Elon found itself down by just one point at the end of the first quarter.

"I felt like we were locked in mentally and a lot more focused [in the first quarter]. I felt like we were a lot sharper in the first quarter of the game in terms of our defensive assignments and making sure we were boxing out," said head coach Charlotte Smith.

The speed seemed to be a big challenge for the Phoenix. After every basket, UNC was pushing the ball up the court immediately to try and shake the Phoenix up in transition. Elon was able to keep up with the Tar Heels for the first quarter, using some missed layups to stay in the game. The pace of the play seemed to catch up to the Phoenix as early as the second quarter.

"What hurt us the most was when they went smaller," Smith said. "They were able to switch a lot of things, and we weren't able to capitalize on the switches."

The Tar Heels came out quickly again in the second, opening up the period with the first five points. Elon was able to get some rhythm of their own



Elon University's women's basketball team huddles at mid-court following the opening game of the season against UNC on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

## HEART over HEIGHT

A young but hungry team is ready to hunt for their third straight championship

Nick Bisconti, Alex Reynolds & Caitlin Rundle

Elon News Network | @elonnewsnetwork

Two hundred and thirty five days after walking off the court in disappointment following a loss to North Carolina State University in the first round of the NCAA tournament, Elon University women's basketball will get its chance to step on to the court again. The Phoenix finished its season last year as Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) champions with an overall record of 25-8 and 14-4 in the conference.

The Phoenix roster is filled to the brim with underclassmen, with just two juniors on the team and no seniors. But head coach Charlotte Smith is confident they will be just fine.

Smith's juniors, guards Lexi Mercer and Jada Graves, "have done a tremendous job stepping up to fill in that leadership role. They lead the team, they're vocal, they're doing great. ... If anything, we have more leadership than maybe we've had in the past in terms of the actual leading and being vocal."

While Smith has five freshmen on the team, inexperience makes it feel like she has more. "Ariana Nance didn't play last year because of her injury, Ariel Colón didn't play much last year either and Emily [Maupin] didn't play much last year, so we really have eight freshmen," Smith said.

The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Tar Heels - Smith's alma mater - will make the trek to Schar Center to open the season with the Phoenix.

Though it may feel like the UNC game is the biggest game

on the schedule, Smith and the rest of her team still have at least 29 other games to be prepared for.

Smith said that in years past, her main goal was to win championships, but this season, the approach has changed to focus on each individual game.

"Our goal is just to take it one day at a time and progress and get better every day," Smith said. "In years past, I'd harp a lot on 'championship, championship, championship,' but this year, I'll probably need to harp more on 'Win the day.'"

Elon will have the luxury of staying close to home in the non-conference portion of their schedule as the team has just five away games on the calendar. The Phoenix only have to leave North Carolina twice, both times to neighboring states Virginia (Dec. 2 at Hampton University) and South Carolina (Dec. 9 at Winthrop University).

The Phoenix will start their quest for a third consecutive CAA championship on Jan. 4 against the Northeastern Huskies. One month later, they will face the Drexel University Dragons on Feb. 1 in a rematch of last year's CAA title game.

"We just need to play our style of basketball, and everything else will come," Graves said.

The journey might be a long one to get to the championships and to the NCAA tournament, but Elon is ready for the challenge. As seen in the team's exhibition game, the Phoenix are capable of sticking together when other teams fall apart.

Smith has high expectations of her team, but as Graves said, "Lexi and I know what coach Smith wants from us. ... We're very coachable, [the other players] are very coachable, so we can handle anything she wants from us."



Junior guard Jada Graves dodges UNC's defense to make a layup in the third quarter on Tuesday, Nov. 6.