



Elon's women's basketball team huddles together before their game against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Schar Center on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

LIAM O'CONNOR | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

How the dream of opening Schar Center became a reality

**Jack Haley & Nick Bisconti**  
Sports Director & Elon News Network  
@jackhaley17 | @elonnewsnetwork

One of Elon University's major components of its strategic plan began its journey on Oct. 21, 2016. Surrounded by members of the board of trustees, then-President Leo Lambert broke ground on the new 5,100-seat, 160,000-square foot Schar Center.

More than two years later, the space sees the sun.

Elon will get to celebrate the new athletic space with a game to which little is comparable in the history of Elon athletics. The men's basketball team will get the opportunity to break in Schar Center with an in-state basketball powerhouse.

On Nov. 9, the Phoenix will welcome the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Tar Heels to Schar Center in a blockbuster debut for the space.

"The attention that we're getting to open up the facility against a storied program like North Carolina is unbelievable," said head coach Matt Matheny. "You can't help but hear from people about tickets or 'Wow, you guys got North Carolina to open up your building,' and we're getting major attention from it."

Though Schar Center has already played host to all volleyball home games, the inauguration of President Connie Book, the Harlem Globetrotters and the women's basketball team getting to open basketball competition in the arena three days earlier, the Friday night contest has been circled on the calendar by most as the day Schar Cen-

ter officially opens.

Elon will get the chance to be on the national stage in their own home by bringing in No. 8 UNC to put on a show.

"We've got a great facility right now, and for everybody that comes in, there's just this 'wow' factor, and there's been several people already in the facility from Chapel Hill and work at North Carolina, and they have the same response of 'Wow, this is really awesome,'" said Director of Athletics Dave Blank.

The Tar Heels have a long, storied history in the world of college basketball.

“

WE'VE GOT A GREAT FACILITY RIGHT NOW, AND FOR EVERYBODY THAT COMES IN, THERE'S JUST THIS 'WOW' FACTOR.

**DAVE BLANK**  
DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS

A seat at the table of legendary programs in college basketball has been officially reserved for UNC.

So how did Elon coax the perennial powerhouse to board buses and make the 37-mile drive west to step Under the Oaks?

With the Phoenix looking to have a big-name team come to open up Schar Center, lots of places were considered. "We considered everybody and anybody because it is not an easy thing to get a team to agree to do," Matheny said. But UNC stuck out in the minds of those in charge of making

a schedule because of some key connections.

For one, Elon has two former UNC basketball players currently sitting on their bench. Jack Wooten graduated from UNC in 2009 after winning a national championship with the Tar Heels under Roy Williams that same year. Wooten, who has a strong relationship with the Tar Heel program, is also an integral part of the scheduling making process for the Phoenix.

Blank made it a point to note that this was not the only key to getting UNC to come to Schar Center. "I think that's always helpful to have that. I don't think that was the key factor. I think it was the relationship and the willingness of Coach Williams and the people in the North Carolina staff that we're all friends with, and we just thought it would be a great thing to do if they could manage it in their schedule," Blank said.

Matheny and Blank seemed to be on the same page in recognizing the impact Williams had on making this dream a reality.

"A lot of credit goes to coach Williams. I've always heard he enjoys doing that; he and I have talked about it, and he told me he likes doing that. There's a lot of very prominent and powerful supporters that support North Carolina and Elon, and I think that played a major role in his willingness to do it, and the proximity to the school helps too," Matheny said. "When we made the strong connection to coach [Roy] Williams and he was able to do it, we were pretty thankful!"

Another suit on the bench also played for Williams. J.B. Tanner played in the Dean Dome and also won a 2009 ring with Wooten. Tanner is now in his fifth season with the Phoe-



Sophomores Shekinah Reese and Lauryn Harper, members of Phoenix Phanatics, dance off the stress of the game during a timeout in Schar Center on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

LIAM O'CONNOR | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**SCHAR CENTER BY THE NUMBERS**

**5,100**

total seats in Schar Center.

**160K**

square-footage of Schar Center.

**~\$40M**

was the approximate cost of the entire space.

nix. With the connections to UNC, it seems only logical that they pay a visit to Elon.

From a marketing perspective, it is not shocking Elon wanted to try and reel in a big name to headline the opening event. Elon is familiar with playing against big-name teams. Elon signed a deal with Duke University to play them three consecutive years, the last of which was 2017. The difference is that the contract stipulated that the two teams met twice in Cameron Indoor, the 9,300-seat home of the Blue Devils, and they played the third game in the Greensboro Coliseum Complex. While that deal was a great one to get the Phoenix some national recognition, it did not let them play on their home hardwood.

Elon struck a deal with UNC similar to the one they had with Duke; also playing

a trio of games. But this time, Elon gets a true home game while still visiting the Tar Heels twice as they did with Duke. Matheny wants to make sure students take full advantage of being able to see the Phoenix take on a prestigious program like UNC.

"What's going to be really cool is the student section. It's going to be full and packed," Matheny said. "To see an Elon fan base hopefully rabid and enjoying college basketball on our campus is something that we enjoy and have dreamed about for a long time."

Win or lose, Elon students will be treated to a marquee matchup that was many months in the making.

For one night, the eyes of one of the nation's most popular college basketball programs will be focused on the scene unfolding in Schar Center.