

ELON PHOENIX



POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

QUARTERBACKS - In 2018 QB Davis Cheek started 6 games & threw for 1,018 (66%, 4-2). In 2019 Cheek was again the starter and threw for 2,175 (58%, 15-6, -32 rush). Mobile backup Joey Baughman played in 9 games (6-8-37-1-0) finishing as the #4 rusher (177, 5.5, 4 td). Cheek missed the Spring of '21 season. Baughman started 2 throwing for 303 (72%, 1-0) & was the #2 rusher (120, 5.5, 2 td) despite being injured & OFY after 2 games. Frosh JR Martin started 3 throwing for 396 (49%, 3-4, -31 rush). RFR Justin Allen started 1 throwing for 290 (57%, 2-3, -15 rush). Last year all four returned, but Cheek started all 11 & had every pass attempt. He threw for 2,924 (63.7%, 17-5) and surprisingly was the #3 rusher (114, 1.6, 3 td). This year they lose 2nd Tm CAA QB Cheek & Martin. Both Baughman & Allen return. They add Montana St transfer Matthew McKay, who played two years at NC State including making 4 starts. Last year at Montana St, McKay started all 11 regular season games throwing for 2,021 (62.2%, 16-3) & finishing as the #4 rusher (316, 4.1, 2 td) despite entering the transfer portal prior to the Bobcats first playoff game. That gives the Phoenix three QB's with starting experience, so despite the loss of a QB with 40 career starts, the unit should come close to last year's numbers.

RUNNING BACKS - In 2018 Jaylan Thomas was the CAA OROY leading the Phoenix with 761 (6.6, 4 td). In 2019 they lost their #4 rusher (258, 4.0, 5 td) & their #2 rusher (591, 6.1), who has been OFY after starting the first 5 in '18. Thomas returned along with #3 rusher DeSean McNair (377, 3.7, 6 td). Thomas led again but with just 415 (3.7, 3 td) while McNair was #2 with 350 (3.8) with a team high 6 rush td. In the spring of 2021 season they had to replace McNair. Thomas led again but this time with just 307 (4.0, 2 td). QB Baughman was #2 while McKinley Weatherspoon was #3 with just 57 (2.4). Last year both returned. Thomas started all 11 and led with 600 (4.1, 4 td). Witherspoon was again #2 with 229 (2.7) & a team best 6 rush td. QB Cheek was #3 & Jake Christman was t-#4 (26, 6.5). This year they lose both Thomas & Christman. Weatherspoon returns along with Malik Griffin (26, 2.0). The Phoenix also add transfer RB Jalen Hampton (PS#85), who RS at Virginia Tech last year. This unit looks to take a step back as they lose their leading rusher from the last 4 years. They do however have a good mix of experience & potential talent, which will be running behind a experienced OLine (4 ret starters), so their numbers may not drop too much.

RECEIVERS - In 2019 Elon returned 7 of their top 8 receivers including their top 2 in WR Cole Taylor (524, 16.9) & WR Kortez Weeks (484, 13.4). They were again the top 2, with Taylor leading again with 441 (12.6, 1 td), while Weeks had 412 (9.6) with a team best 5 receiving td's. Bryson Daughtry was #3 with 359 (13.3, 1 td). Jackson Parham was #7 with 147 (11.3) while Chandler Brayboy was #8 (72, 18.0). In the spring of 2021 season they had to replace Taylor but returned both Weeks & Daughtry. Weeks played in just 3 games finishing #7 with 66 (8.3). Daughtry was #2 with just 161 (8.9). Parham stepped up & led with 197 (14.1) & Brayboy was #3 (149, 18.6). Last year all four returned. Parham (10 st) led with 820 (14.4, 1 td) and was 1st Tm all-CAA. Weeks (11 st) stepped up finishing #2 with 542 (11.3, 5 td). Despite not starting Daughtry finished close behind with 512 (14.6, 5 td). Brayboy (11 st) finished #4 (396, 11.3, 3 td). This year they lose Weeks & #7 TE Donovan Williams (9 st, 95, 7.9, 1 td). They also add ODU transfer Cornell Hendrick (3 st

in '19). With three of their top four receivers back this unit is very experienced and should have a solid season, no matter who wins the starting QB spot.

OFFENSIVE LINE - In 2019 the OLine lost three 11 game starters including an AART & a 1st Tm CAA LT. After avg 200 ypg rush & 4.6 ypc in 2018, the Phoenix averaged just 119 ypg & 3.3 ypc but did cut their sacks allowed from 32 to 23. In the spring of 2021 they again had to replace three starters and plummeted even further averaging just 86 ypg rush & 3.0 ypc but only allowed 8 sacks. In the Fall last year they returned all 5 starters from the spring, but continued to struggle. They averaged just 90 ypg rush & 2.9 ypc while allowing 19 sacks. This year they lose C Nick Cerimele, who started the last 8 games & RT Cameron Orr who started the first 2 games. They return 5 OL who combined for 34 starts last year with 4 who started 9+ including Frosh AA RG Jabril Williams (11 st). Despite losing Cerimele their most experienced OL (21 car sts), they have a solid core & return 70 career starts. We look for them to make a solid improvement in their run game this season.

DEFENSIVE LINE - In 2019 Elon returned their top 5 DL including all three starters led by 3rd tm CAA DE Marcus Willoughby (11 st, 58 tkl, 2.5 sk, 4 tfl) & DE Jordan Dollerson (33 tkl, 3.5 tfl). They allowed the same 166 ypg rush while improving the ypc allowed slightly from 4.2 to 4.1 but the defense's sack total went from 32 to 23! In the spring of 2021, The DLine had to replace 2 starters and struggled as they allowed 219 ypg rush, 4.9 ypc while having just 8 sacks in their 6 game season. In the Fall of 2021 we called for some solid improvement as the DLine returned all three starters. They allowed just 146 ypg rush & 4.1 ypc while increasing their sack total to 21. This year they lose NG Tristen Cox (9 st, 15 tkl, 1.5 tfl) & NG Joey Barbera (2 st, 14 tkl, 1.5 tfl). They return 4 of their top 3 DL including their top 3 in 4th Tm CAA DE Terrence Williams (11 st, 46 tkl, 3 sk, 3 tfl), DE Josh Johnson (2 st, 20 tkl, 2.5 tfl) & DE Marvin Pearson (9 st, 18 tkl, 2 sk, 4 tfl). While it will be hard to replace Cox's 40 career starts in the middle, they have solid experience depth at DE & should put solid pressure in opposing QB's.

LINEBACKERS - The LB corps returned 6 of their top 8 LB's but lost their top 2 LB's (1st & 3rd tm CAA) in 2019. They went from allowing 23.6 ppg & 359 ypg in 2018 to allowing 27.0 & 387. In the spring of 2021 Elon returned all three starting LB's but surprising slipped even further allowing 30.8 ppg & 406 ypg. In the Fall of 2021 the LB Corps lost 1 starter in Ty Sponseller (#8 tkl'r, 2.5 tfl). With most of the unit back they improved to allowing just 379 ypg & 26.1 ppg. This year the unit returns their top 5 LB, including all 4 who combined for 33 starts last year. They are led by Devonte Chandler (11 st, #2 tkl'r, 3.5 sk, 7 tfl), Jamir Malone (L/8 st, #3, 5 tfl) & Trey Alsbrooks (11 st, #5, 2.5 sk). They also add Coastal Carolina transfer Shon Brown (PS#244). This is a solid & deep unit & should improve again.

DEFENSIVE BACKS - In 2018 the secondary allowed just 193 ypg pass (56%) allowing a solid 15-13 ratio. In 2019 the unit lost 4 of their top 7, who combined for 33 starts in 2018 including a 2nd Tm CAA CB & a 3rd Tm CAA FS. The allowed 221 ypg pass (61%) while allowing a still solid 19-13 ratio. In the spring season of 2021, the unit lost two starters in 2nd Tm CAA CB Daniel Reid-Benneett (55 tkl, 11 pd, 3 int) & 1st Tm AA CB Greg Liggs (49 tkl, 8 int, 13 pbu). They returned 4 of their top 6 DB's including BAN Cole Coleman (#1 tkl'r, 3 tfl) & S TreVon Jones (#4, 5 pd). They allowed just 188 ypg passing but allowed 64% completions with a 7-4 ratio. Last year they returned 4 starters but lost DB Jarquez Bizzell (#9 tkl'r 4 tfl) and McAllister Ingram (#10). They again returned S Coleman (#5 tkl'r) & Jones (#1, 4 tfl) along with BAN Omar Rogers (#2, 2 int). They slipped some allowing 233 ypg passing (59.7%) and allowed a 23-9 ratio. This year they only lose 1 starter in CB Shamari Wingard (8 st, #10 tkl'r, 2 int, 7 pbu). They return 7 DB's who combined for 47 starts last year led by 1st Tm CAA FS Coleman (#1 tkl'r, 4 tfl, 4 pd), 3rd Tm CAA CB Jones (#4, 5 tfl, 2 int, 3 pbu) & BAN Rogers (#6, 1 sk, 2 int). With an experienced front 7 in front we expect a marked improvement by the secondary this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS - In 2019 the Special Teams returned all their top players including P Hunter Stephenson (40.0 avg), K/KO Skylar Davis (17-22 FG, 2 TB/17 KO) & K/O Christian VanSickle (5 TB/41 KO). Stephenson averaged 41.7 ypp, Davis hit 10-15 FG (L/50) but VanSickle had just 2 KO's (0 TB) as Owen Johnson took over (5 TB/48 KO). KR Shamari Wingard averaged 26.1 ypr with 1 td. In the spring of 2021 Stephenson avg'd 43.4 ypp while Davis hit 7-9 FG (L/34) & also handled KO's (9 TB/25 KO). Last season they had to replace Stephenson & new P Jeff Yurk averaged just 37.8 ypp but had 7 TB/45 KO. Davis returned and had another solid season hitting 17-22 FG (L/52) & had 2 TB/12 KO. Both return this year but they will be under new STC Milo Austin.

COACHES - Tony Trisciani was the DC here from 2017-'18 but now enters his 4th season as HC of the Phoenix, he is 12-16 including 9-11 in CAA play. New DC Dovonte Edwards was the Def Pass game coordinator here last year after 2 years as Def Pass game coordinator at NC Central. Drew Folmar enters his 6th season as Elon's OC, he had spent the prior 3 years as the OC at Lehigh. Milo Austin takes over as the new STC he was the STC at Texas Southern last year, at Delaware St ('19-'20) & at Morehead St ('15-'18.)

FORECAST

OFFENSE - In 2019 the Phoenix returned 6 starters from their offense that put up 24.4 ppg (#8 CAA) & 374 ypg (#4 CAA) in 2018. They had to replace their 3rd Tm CAA RB but he had been lost to injury after starting the first 5 in 2018. With QB Davis Cheek in his first full year (6 st in '18) as the starter, Elon improved to 25.1 ppg (#8 CAA) but slipped to just 320 ypg (#12 CAA). In the crazy 2020/spring 2021 season they were without QB Cheek and then lost QB Joey Baughman to injury after starting the first 2. With two other QB's starting the other 4 games it is not surprising that they slipped to just 17.3 ppg (#10 CAA) & 254 ypg (#10 CAA). Last season they not only returned all 11 offensive starters but also returned QB Cheek, who had every one of their pass attempts. After finishing with -31 rush yards in 2019, Cheek surprisingly finished as their #3 rusher (114, 1.6). Elon's offense improved to putting up 24.1 ppg (#5 CAA) & 356 ypg (#3 CAA). This year they lose QB Cheek, 2 of their top 3 RB's & their #2 WR. The offense return 6 starters including 4 OL and also return 3 of their top 4 receivers. They add Montana St transfer QB Matthew McKay, who got the Bobcats to the playoffs last year & 2 FBS transfers. So despite the losses they may not drop by much if at all.

DEFENSE - In 2018 Elon allowed 23.6 ppg (#7 CAA) & 359 ypg (#8 CAA). They returned 6 starters in 2019 and allowed 27.0 ppg (#7 CAA) & 387 ypg (#8 CAA). In spring of 2021 they returned 7 starters on defense including all 3 on the DLine but lost 4 of their 5 all-CAA players. They slipped to allowing 30.8 ppg (#10 CAA) & 406 ypg (#10 CAA). Last year they returned 9 starters but just 7 of their top 10 tacklers. They improved to allowing just 26.1 ppg (#8 CAA) & 379 ypg (#10 CAA). This year they return 9 starters including all 3 all-CAA players from the defense and 16 of their top 19 tkl's including their 8 & add an FBS transfer. This experienced unit should make a big improvement this season.

2022 - After back-to-back winning seasons in 2017 & 2018, The Phoenix finished just 5-6 in 2019 including an OT loss to William & Mary. In the spring of 2021 without their starting QB they finished just 1-5 with their final 2 games cancelled. Last year they started just 1-3 including a par of losses by 2 & 3 points. they then upset #21 Richmond 20-7 to start a 3 game win streak. At 4-4 they lost to #5 JMU & #13 Villanova. They avoided a third straight losing season by winning their final 2 games by 23 & 15 points. This year under 4th year HC Trisciani, they return 15 starters & fill the some of the holes with some solid transfer. While the offense may take a small step back the defense should take a big step forward putting them as a whole on par with last year's team. This year their schedule is the key. JMU leaves for the FBS being replace by Hampton in CAA play. Despite opening at Vanderbilt none of their foes this year finished with a winning conf record last year. That should mean not only a second straight winning season but also gives the Phoenix a great chance to return to the playoffs for the first time since 2017.