Eلون University’s cross country teams looking forward to potential record breaking seasons

Jacob Kisamore
Sports Director | @jacob_kisamore

Elon University cross country is quickly becoming one of the most formidable programs in the Colonial Athletic Association. With the women’s team looking to achieve a historic milestone and the men’s team loaded with young talent, both will look to contend for conference championships this fall.

Kevin Jermyn is in his fifth season as head coach for both teams and is looking forward to what is in store for his runners.

“We want to make the most of whatever opportunities we have,” Jermyn said. “We can’t control everything that happens. We can only control our effort and our attitude, and that’s what we’ll try to focus our best on.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the teams pushed their 2020 fall seasons back to the spring of 2021. There were just three meets last season, about half of what constitutes a typical cross country schedule. This year, however, the teams currently have five meets on the calendar.

Chasing history
This season, the women’s cross country team will attempt to accomplish something that no Elon team has done since joining the CAA in 2014 — win three consecutive conference championships.

The last Elon team to win three conference championships was the men’s soccer team, which earned three consecutive Southern Conference tournament titles from 2011-2013. Only the women’s track and field team has won back-to-back conference titles since Elon joined the CAA, doing so in 2015 and 2016.

Additionally, no women’s cross country team in the CAA has won three straight team titles since William & Mary claimed five in a row from 2012-2016.

Jermyn believes the Phoenix has a strong chance of making history this season but also wants to convey to his team that the season is not “just about some trophy.”

“We want to keep on pushing to try to keep evolving and growing,” Jermyn said. “We’re wanting to get better and do things we’ve never done before, but we also want to enjoy it and have fun doing what we do and make that a reward because while a championship happens on one day, your experience is ultimately a summation of all the days.”

Junior Maria Ahm is coming off a stellar individual season, having defended her CAA individual title in the 6K race at the CAA Championship meet, a record for the event. Ahm believes her individual success is a result of her dedication to the sport.

“Senior Mario Ahm is going into this year’s season defending her CAA individual title in the 6K race as the CAA Championship meet,” Jermyn said. “We want to keep on pushing to try to keep evolving and growing. We’re wanting to get better and do things we’ve never done before, but we also want to enjoy it and have fun doing what we do and make that a reward because while a championship happens on one day, your experience is ultimately a summation of all the days.”

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The need for speed

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2021 FALL SPORTS SCHEDULE

**MEN'S SOCCER**

- **SEPTEMBER 4**
  - Elon vs Wofford
  - 2:00 PM

- **SEPTEMBER 25**
  - Elon vs William & Mary
  - 2:00 PM

- **OCTOBER 23**
  - Elon vs New Hampshire
  - 2:00 PM

**WOMEN'S SOCCER**

- **SEPTEMBER 9**
  - Elon vs Gardner-Webb
  - 7:00 PM

- **SEPTEMBER 17**
  - Elon vs Furman
  - 7:00 PM

- **OCTOBER 3**
  - Elon vs Delaware
  - 1:00 PM

**VOLLEYBALL**

- **SEPTEMBER 8**
  - Elon vs Charlotte
  - 6:00 PM

- **SEPTEMBER 10**
  - Elon vs UNC Asheville
  - 6:00 PM

**CROSS COUNTRY**

- **SEPTEMBER 3**
  - Elon Opener
  - 8:00 PM

- **SEPTEMBER 17**
  - Firetower Project
  - TBD

- **OCTOBER 1**
  - Paul Short Run
  - TBD
Elon football looks to reload this fall after a disappointing spring season

Kela Noble
Elon News Network | ENews@EUniv

Full football is back at Elon University for its 25th season at Rhodes Stadium. The university continues to prepare to welcome back fans at 100% capacity inside Rhodes Stadium this fall, and a full 11 game season is on the horizon with the Colonial Athletic Association returning to the gridiron, four months after concluding their spring season.

Elon University's football team (1-5) dealt with a fair share of injuries and hardships during the spring but now the roster is back intact, returning 20 of 22 starters from the spring season, and the team is now ready to give the fans something to cheer for.

Return of the offense

Elon's offense will feature one of Head Coach Tony Trisciani's best and complete casts he has had in his three years at Elon this fall, with senior quarterback Davis Cheek vying to take over as the starter in 2019, Cheek threw the spring season with his second time in 673 days after missing Rhodes Stadium as the Phoenix's offensive line followed him all the way.

On Sept. 4, Cheek will return to Rhodes Stadium as the Phoenix's starting quarterback for the first time in 673 days after missing the spring due to an ACL injury. In his last season as the starter, in 2019, Cheek threw for 2,175 yards to go along with 15 touchdowns, earning two CAA Offensive Player of the Week honors.

The area we're strong in: You give us the space and we'll get the job done.

Trisciani said. "We just have to continue to trust each other and trust in the hard work that we all put in," Torrence Williams said. "Those are just real two things that we have to do and continue to do and that's what we plan to do in the fall."

Kevin Williams and senior nose tackle Tommy Conwell led the Phoenix's defense this spring, allowing Elon's young players to gain valuable experience and pairing that with the team's veterans.

Trisciani said. "It's a veteran group, and then you add in some youthful athleticism that we've added the last couple of years, I feel good about the group. We've got to keep them healthy and get out there and execute and finish football games."

Revenge of the defense

The Phoenix defense faced its own struggles during the spring season, allowing 30.83 points per game and 406.35 total yards per game. The unit's main struggle came from allowing big plays mainly in the running game.

"We just have to continue to trust each other and trust in the hard work that we all put in," Torrence Williams said. "Those are just real two things that we have to do and continue to do and that's what we plan to do in the fall."

This season, Elon's secondary looks to return to lockdown form with cornerback Cole Coleman, sophomore safety Trevon Jones, redshirt freshman defensive back Omar Rogers and senior cornerback Isael Greene.

Meanwhile, the Phoenix looks to reload this fall after a disappointing spring season with their second time in 673 days after missing Rhodes Stadium.

While challenging, the spring season allowed Elon's young players to gain valuable experience under their belt, Elon's defensive unit is expected to become more resilient this season.

"We just have to continue to trust each other and trust in the hard work that we all put in," Torrence Williams said. "Those are just real two things that we have to do and continue to do and that's what we plan to do in the fall."

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Elon football player portraits for a shoot during a team scrimmage at Rhodes Stadium on Aug. 21.

Jon Seaton plays student, athlete and TikTok star

Elon University football player has over 1.5 million followers on the video sharing platform

Joanna Dyer
Elon News Network

Student athletes balance classes, extracurricular activities and their social lives, but one Elon University football player has one more responsibility on his plate — managing his social media stardom.

Though his TikTok account has now reached 1.5 million followers, sophomore Seaton, a defensive lineman for Elon Football said he doesn’t consider himself a celebrity.

“I get up in the morning, I make breakfast, I go workout and go to sleep,” Seaton said. “It’s not anything too different in my daily life.”

To keep himself busy during the COVID-19 pandemic, when not working out or running football drills, Seaton turned to TikTok, creating content about football and life.

Seaton said he enjoys creating content focused on being himself. He said he has fun making these videos, which allow him to truly be himself.

“My type of content to make really has to do with being a bigger guy in society because that’s the most fun for me,” Seaton said. “It’s almost a way to get away from football because I’m thinking about football for 12 hours of the day.”

Seaton’s first video in his “Big Boy Probs” series blew up. A few days after posting, he looked back and saw that the video had exceeded three million views on the app. What started out as a fun app trend has snowballed into something bigger than he could have ever dreamed of.

Seaton said he did not expect such a reaction to the series.

"I do enjoy the Big Boy Probs because every time he does it and puts up a new idea my girlfriend asks ‘Do you do all these,’ and I say ‘Yeah, I do,’ “ Cerimele said.

NICK CERIMELE
Elon News Network

He just does his work, he’s very humble about his success, he doesn’t shove it in our face.

Seaton's TikTok fame, he is currently working on his own clothing line and is also working to post more often on other social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Twitch in order to reach more people.

Seaton's TikTok does, however, spark some conversation between teammates everyday now and then. Cerimele discovered Seaton’s account before he arrived at the school and did not know what to expect when the time finally came for the two to meet.

“He’s probably one of the most humble people I know,” Cerimele said. “He just does his work. He’s very humble about his success, he doesn’t shove it in our face.”

Recently, the NCAA passed new legislation that will allow athletes to profit off their name, image and likeness. Seaton said he is experimenting with different ways to diversify his content and is also working to post more often on other social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Twitch in order to reach more people.

Seaton’s TikTok fame, he is currently working to develop his own clothing line and with the first release coming soon.

“The Phoenix defense faced its own struggles during the spring season, allowing 30.83 points per game and 406.35 total yards per game. The unit’s main struggle came from allowing big plays mainly in the running game. Elon's defense gave up a longest rush over 30 yards in four of their six games. However, with another year of experience under their belt, Elon’s defensive unit is expected to become more resilient this season.

"We just have to continue to trust each other and trust in the hard work that we all put in," Torrence Williams said. "Those are just real two things that we have to do and continue to do and that's what we plan to do in the fall."

This season, Elon’s secondary looks to return to locking down form with corners Coleman, safety Trevon Jones, redshirt freshman defensive back Omar Rogers and senior cornerback Isael Greene.

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“Once I get good with all the social media, I’ll move into a bunch of other stuff trying to see what other things I can stick my nose into,” Seaton said. Seaton said he sets high standards for himself and hopes to accomplish something bigger than himself.

With growing platforms, he hopes to continue to help people that look up to him.

“I’m just trying to help spread stories, some really cool messages, and put some cool stuff out there,” Seaton said.
“It’s about consistency and working hard every day,” Ahm said. “It’s about going out and running even on the days you don’t want to.”

Jermyn said Ahm brings “tremendous strength” to Elon’s cross country program and serves as a role model for how other runners should conduct themselves both on and off the course.

“She brings a passion and a work ethic that is as high and strong as anybody I’ve ever coached,” Jermyn said.

Other runners returning from last year’s championship team include senior Hannah Preco, juniors Anna Twomey and Maggie Springer and redshirt sophomore Leandra Lorenz, all of whom earned all-CAA honors.

Ahm said the team has strong chemistry and is confident they can win a third straight conference title.

“It would mean a lot and I think it would show how consistent we are,” Ahm said. “Winning the title for a third time in a row would be huge and I really believe we can do it.”

Looking to break through

While the men’s cross country team has not enjoyed the same amount of success the women’s team has in recent seasons, the group is confident they are on the brink of breaking through in the CAA.

Among the leaders on this year’s team is junior Aidan Tierney, who has earned all-CAA honors each of the last two seasons and finished eighth in last season’s CAA championship.

The men’s program has not won a conference title since it won the Southern Atlantic Conference in 1996, but with a young core of runners returning, Tierney is confident the team is capable of improving on last season’s results and possibly pushing for a CAA title.

“We have the personnel, we have the talent, we have what we need to do something really special in the history of this school,” Tierney said. “I really do believe this could be our strongest year ever.”

Other runners returning this year are senior Andrew Miller, junior Tamer Metwali and sophomores Zane Jackson, Ethan Mimeles and Cameron Dunn.

Tierney is the only senior on this year’s roster.

Jermyn believes some of the younger runners on the roster could take huge strides this season to help expand the team’s depth and possibly push them toward the top of the CAA this season.

“If we can have some guys close the gap in the fourth and fifth spots, we can go out there and try to contend for being the top two in the conference.”

The Elon Opener

Both the men’s and women’s cross country teams will begin their seasons on Sept. 3 in the Elon Opener at the Elon University cross country course. The race begins at 8 p.m. with spectators allowed.

Due to COVID-19, Elon’s cross country program was unable to host a meet last season. Jermyn believes the event will serve as a “rust buster” for both teams and is glad they have the opportunity to compete at home this year.

“We’ve just gotta go out there and race to know, ‘Ok, this is what we’re training for,’ because when you spend three or four months just training, you get stuck in a mindset where you’re doing a lot of easy and medium stuff, but racing is a whole ‘nother skillset,” Jermyn said. “All we look for in this meet is to get back in touch with that.”
The volleyball team is confident that veteran leaders can help them make noise in the CAA.

Jacob Kissmeyer
Sports Director | @JackKissmeyer

The Elon University women’s volleyball team finished its shortened spring season with a bitter taste in its mouth. Needing just one victory in its final two regular season matches against College of Charleston to qualify for the Colonial Athletic Association Tournament, the team lost both matches and failed to secure a spot.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the team was unable to compete a traditional fall season in 2020, but did complete an abbreviated 10 match regular season in the spring of 2021. Though the team went just 5-5 and did not make the CAA Tournament in the spring, the shortened season allowed players to gain valuable experience and build chemistry on the court in preparation for the fall.

Now, the veteran-laden team is looking to redeem itself. With a full schedule and a number of key players returning, the team has set lofty expectations for the upcoming fall season.

“They’re very motivated to do well and to push to not only get to the conference championship, “ Head Coach Mary Tendler said. “This past season, she did a really great job balancing that and being able to switch from one to the other and we hope that she continues that in her senior year here.”

Tendler equated the setter position in volleyball with a quarterback in football, because they call the plays and “have to be a coach on the court.” Clark said the position involves a lot of quick thinking and precision.

“You have to analyze who’s hitting well but also you need to analyze who the blockers are cheating too and how you’re gonna get the blocker to cheat a different way,” Clark said. “It’s about playing strategically and finding the piece that fits the puzzle best.”

While almost all of the Phoenix’s key players from last season are back, there is one important exception - setter Kodi Garcia, who transferred to Stephen F. Austin to complete her fifth year of athletic eligibility. While Clark no longer has her dynamic setting partner to work with, she believes she can carry the load at setter and fill Garcia’s shoes.

“It’s definitely going to be weird being the veteran setter now because ever since I came in, it has always been me and Kodi, but I think I am definitely more than capable of stepping in and taking that role,” Clark said.

.return to a full schedule

The Phoenix currently have 26 regular season matches scheduled, including 16 CAA matches. The team’s non-conference schedule includes three Atlantic Coast Conference opponents - Duke University, UNC-Chapel Hill and Virginia Tech.

Last season, the team lost its first two conference matches. Junior libero Jordan Gower said a fast start in CAA play is “extremely important” for the team this season.

“We really need to play even throughout the season and not have a lot of ups and downs,” Gower said. “I think coming out strong in our first conference matches would really give us the confidence and show us that we can hang with these teams in the conference.”

The Phoenix begin the season by participating in the Virginia Tech Invitational in Blacksburg, Virginia. The team will face Toledo and Lehigh on Friday, Aug. 27 before taking on Virginia Tech on Saturday, Aug. 28.

“I hope we get better each match and improve throughout the weekend and hopefully we’ll play our best match against Virginia Tech on that Saturday,” Tendler said.
The team is focused on having another winning season after their first CAA conference title in the spring.

Caleigh Lawlor
Elon News Network | Kyle Lawlor

With the 2021 Elon University women’s soccer season underway, players and coaches alike are preparing for another winning year.

Last season was a historic one for the team. For the first time in program history, the Phoenix won the Colonial Athletic Association Tournament. The conference title gave the team an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament, making it the first time they appeared in the NCAA bracket since 1999, when they were in the Big South Conference.

As they enter their seventh season in the CAA, the team finished tied for second in the conference’s preseason poll, as voted on by the head coaches of the league’s 12 member schools. The team is tied in the poll with the University of North Carolina Wilmington Seahawks and sits behind only the Hofstra Pride.

Head Coach Neil Payne said he has high hopes for the team, which returns 22 players from last season.

“Within the group, they’re starting to get a real appetite for success. They really bought into our blueprint last year,” said Payne. “This is by far the strongest the group has ever looked reporting for pre-season training.”

Looking ahead to the fall
This season, the Phoenix will face seven non-conference opponents before the conference opener on Sept. 26, where it will face the University of North Carolina Wilmington Seahawks and sits behind only the Hofstra Pride.

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“The group, they’re starting to get a real appetite for success. They really bought into our blueprint last year,” said Payne. “This is by far the strongest the group has ever looked reporting for pre-season training.”

The team travels to Durham to open their regular season against UNCG on Aug. 20.

Bend, but don’t break: the Phoenix are ready to go
Elon University’s men’s soccer team is ready for a breakout season.

Luke Jackson
Elon News Network | Alex Jackson

Last season was strange for every Elon University sports team due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Phoenix men’s soccer program had it no different. Their very first game of the season against Liberty was canceled and they only played eight games, less than half the number they play in a normal campaign.

Outside of the loss column, last season may have set the stage for a triumphant entry into 2021.

Experienced leadership
The Phoenix return redshirt junior captain Sam Bacon and junior midfielder Jeppe Jordoson, who are the team’s prominent leaders this season.

“Last year was tough for a lot of different reasons,” Bacon said. “As a captain, you’re not only responsible for your own performance but also how the team handles potentially being shut down for two weeks, or having to play without three key guys.”

Bacon had a decorated finish to his redshirt sophomore season, earning the team’s Leadership Award as well as being recognized by the CAA via the Leadership and Sport Excellence Award.

Jordoson steps into a new role this season as a captain, and though he has leadership experience from his Danish U19 team, Smørdysjk, he said knows Division I college soccer is a new challenge.

“It’s not only myself I’m playing and caring for — I’m stepping into a role where I have to be the link between the managers and coaches all the way down to the players,” Jordoson said. “Sam and I are the step between the players and the coaches, so that’s definitely something I have to develop so I can step into this role.”

But it goes beyond just on-field leadership for Bacon, who believes last season prepared him to take on additional responsibilities off the field.

“I learned the importance of checking in on guys and making sure team morale is high. I learned about the importance of team morale for how effectively we’re training and playing,” Bacon said.

Benton Reeves believes a number of players on the team are poised for a breakout season, and not least among them is junior forward Mason Di Meo.

“Last year was the outstanding summer season with the NC Fusion meets U23 team of USL League 2 — joined by Elon teammates Bacon and Cam Pellegrino and the Phoenix,” said Reeves. “And it’s something that we want to experience again.”

A new season
“Bend, but don’t break” is a phrase Reeves is keeping in mind as the team nears the beginning of the 2021 season. He is happy that the team is carrying over momentum from last season’s two closing victories, but he knows there is no time to rest on those laurels.

“It’s a new season, a new team, and a new process,” said Reeves.

The team travels to Durham to open their regular season against Furman on Aug. 27.
Elon University club and intramural sports hope for normal return

Club sports

While some club sports teams played games in fall 2020, others did not. Club soccer was one of the sports that couldn’t practice due to health and safety restrictions.

This year, however, the club soccer team is ready to return to the pitch with competitive games. Senior and team president Sarah Mouton said that, as of now, there are no social or travel restrictions for the team and that they will look to schedule as many matches as possible.

“We’ve been giving the go-ahead to pretty much plan the season like it would be normally without any restrictions at all, but obviously we’re still thinking of ways to kind of accommodate those that are still worried about it and have their doubts,” Mouton said.

Last year, Elon’s Campus Recreation and Wellness staff divided club sports into classifications based on how much contact was inherent in the sport. High contact sports, such as ice hockey, rugby and soccer could not compete and had to either opt out of their seasons or could only practice and condition, while sports that require less contact, such as fencing, golf, equestrian and tennis could travel and compete.

“We anticipate a normal year,” Mouton said. “COVID-19 still poses a threat to the team’s season and will encourage members to make smart choices regarding social interactions.”

“We’re just hoping for the best and scheduling all the games that we can while we’re still allowed to,” Mouton said.

There are currently 25 club sports teams registered to compete during the 2021-22 academic year, ranging from traditional sports, such as soccer, basketball and baseball, to more niche sports, such as equestrian, climbing and esports.

Intramural sports

Due to COVID-19, Mellinger said the university took different intramural and club offerings to outdoor activities with little contact, such as cornhole and sand volleyball, to prevent the spread of the virus. They required all participants to wear masks while playing and reduced the number of students allowed to take part in competitions.

With social restrictions lingering during the spring semester, Elon Campus Recreation and Wellness began offering intramural sports in indoor spaces and also raised the limits on participants for outdoor activities.

“We focus on participation, creating a sense of community and just bringing folks together in a laid back environment that still allows them to complete or compete, play, or learn a sport,” Mellinger said. “We started to reopen our indoor facilities because the primary outcome for us was to bring people together and we knew that we had to do something.”

This year, more traditional offerings are returning, with flag football, floor hockey and indoor volleyball currently listed on the fall intramural schedule. The only health restriction currently in place for intramural sports is that unvaccinated students must wear masks when they play.

“As it stands now, intramurals will be going largely back to what they looked like,” Mellinger said.

Staying flexible

While both club and intramural sports will in large part return to normal this fall, Mellinger said the campus recreation and wellness staff must be “nimble and flexible” to adapt to any safety policy changes from the CDC or the school.

“Obviously, campus recreation and wellness policies have to fall within campus policies,” Mellinger said. “We’re also paying close attention to news coming out from the CDC and will adjust accordingly.”

For Mellinger, the return to normalcy in both club and intramural sports is long overdue. He said he looks forward to seeing competitions and activities return to full capacity.

“It’s exciting to walk out onto our fields on a weekend and see us having a match or a tournament and seeing our students doing what they are so passionate about,” Mellinger said.

Fall sports preview

Elon University dance team claims NDA Gold Bid

The team placed first in the Division I Game Day routine to receive a bid for the NDA Nationals competition

Gabby Clancy

Elon University senior dance team member Shannon Treacy’s hands were numb as she awaited the results of the National Dance Association Camp team dance competition in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The members of Elon’s dance team all anxiously held hands as their fate hung in the balance.

As the announcer read out the results, Treacy and her teammates broke into elation upon learning Elon had placed first in the Game Day routine competition.

“As soon as they started saying Elon and you could hear the first syllable, we knew it was us,” Treacy said. “We just burst into pure excitement, jumping up and down, hugging whoever was next to us.”

By coming in first place in the game day competition, Elon’s dance team earned a Gold Bid to compete in next April’s NDA Nationals competition in Daytona Beach, Florida. This is the program’s first ever gold bid, which will provide many perks, including a free trip, including receiving free five free hotel rooms, a reduced registration fee per person and first priority on hotel assignments.

“It really gives our team a lot more opportunities and a lot less stress because we’re preparing for this but the last thing we want to be worrying about is funds when we’re working so hard on our dances,” junior dancer Devyn Battaglia said.

Before the team walked onto the floor for the final round of the competition, the team huddled up backstage to get in a winning mindset. Senior and captain Gabby Clancy wanted to make sure her teammates were focused and ready to perform their best.

“We knew we were doing it for the person next to us, ourselves and our coach too. This is the time to make everything that we’ve worked for worth it,” Clancy said. “It was a really special feeling to see everyone excited to go on stage and dance for one another and dance for themselves.”

The team choreographed its dance to accompany Elon’s fight song, and though they made it look effortless on the dance floor, weeks of hard work went into perfecting the routine, which makes their performance taste even sweeter.

“The feeling that you get when you know you put in all these hours, blood, sweat and tears and get that award and just saying to each other that all those long practices were worth it, it’s just an unreal feeling,” Clancy said.

Elon competed against a number of prominent schools, including North Carolina State University, Clemson University and The University of South Carolina, the defending ATA national champions.

For Clancy, facing two dance teams from Atlantic Coast Conference schools, who have larger rosters and more resources, is a statement that Elon’s dance team can compete with anyone in the country.

“We are a small school and we don’t come from a school that has 40 girls on their dance team and has these huge recruiting classes coming in,” Clancy said. “To be able to compete with them and place high in the national competition is just an unreal feeling that we put in that a lot of people don’t see on the inside.”

While the initial celebration following the event was immense, winning the gold bid did not fully sink in for Treacy until the team’s car ride back to Elon.

“It turned around in the van and I was like, ‘Do you guys realize what actually happened?’ Like we just won the first gold bid for Elon. It’s just so hard to grasp and it’s so surreal and I couldn’t be more proud,” Treacy said.

While Nationals will not begin until April, members of the dance team are already looking forward to the event and for the chance to represent Elon University on a national stage.

“I think the motivation and drive we have to put in the work in order to perform at our highest potential is at an all-time high,” Clancy said. “This team has so much talent within them that we can go far.”

The team will begin performing at athletic events on Sept. 4, starting with Elon’s home football game versus Wofford, and will also spend time throughout the fall preparing for Nationals.

Junior Lucy Allen is looking forward to the upcoming season and expects the team to perform well throughout.

“Coming out of NDA Camp, I feel really motivated and I feel like our team is going to have a really strong presence on campus,” Allen said. “This year, our team has some of the strongest people and dancers I’ve ever met, all dancing together.”

_The Elon University dance team also scored second place in the Division I Team Dance._
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN 2021-22 ATHLETICS?

Deputy Director of Athletics Mike Ward answers questions about what the upcoming year will look like for athletics

Caitlin Rundle | Elon News Network | @caitrull1

The Delta variant of COVID-19 spiraling across the country, there are still health and safety concerns for Elon Athletics to manage this year. Mike Ward is Elon University's deputy director of athletics and serves as the athletic representative on Elon University's Ready and Resilient Committee.

With the Delta variant of COVID-19 spiraling across the country, there are still health and safety concerns for Elon Athletics to manage this year. Mike Ward is Elon University's deputy director of athletics and serves as the athletic representative on Elon University's Ready and Resilient Committee. Elon News Network spoke with Ward about the upcoming year for Elon Athletics and how the program will manage fans and events during the ongoing pandemic.

The interview has been edited for clarity.

Q: If rules and expectations were to stay exactly the same as they are right now, what can we expect to see changed within athletics to adjust back to what hopefully looks a little more normal?

A: It will look and feel closer to the 2019 season. We're competing full schedules in all of our sports, and that's exciting. Last year, we had a condensed schedule with all of our teams competing in the spring, and while it was fun, it was also very hectic. Last year when we were in August, we were still trying to figure out what our plan was for the school year. This year, we are in a healthier spot, and our programs have great vaccination levels, and we're better able to practice safely.

Q: What percentage of Elon athletics is vaccinated at this point, including athletes, coaches, training staff and all other staff?

A: We expect athletics to be 95% or above. They've shown great leadership, they know it impacts their ability to do something they dearly love and they want to have a full and complete season.

Q: Have international students had the chance to get vaccinated?

A: There's an opportunity for them to receive the vaccine as soon as they can get it on their arrival. I know we have some student athletes who've been unable to get it in their home countries, but arrangements have been made for them to get it once they're here.

Q: Will fans need to show proof of vaccination to enter Elon sporting events and will there be a mask requirement to get into indoor sporting venues?

A: We are not planning on requiring proof of vaccination to enter any of our buildings; however, we are expecting fans to follow whatever the state guidelines are based on their personal circumstances.

Q: Fans were not allowed to attend indoor sports last year. Will fans be allowed at indoor events this year?

A: From a fan perspective, I also think 2021-22 athletic seasons will look and feel a little more traditional and normal in nature, normal plus if you will. There will be normal game activities, the plus in our events will be reacting to what masking rules are for both indoors and outdoors, and a lot of that changes day to day and week to week.

Q: Limited numbers of fans were allowed at outdoor events last year with certain restrictions. Are there restrictions on capacity for this year?

A: This year, we do not have a capacity cap, and we have a pretty good idea of demographically what our attendance will be. We've watched what happened this summer with Simone Biles. I think it's a lot easier to have conversations when you see public figures address mental health and wellness very openly. What we have to do is be ready to receive those conversations, engage with our student athletes and walk a path together.

Q: Do you think getting students to attend athletic events will be a challenge this year?

A: When you think about it, 50% of our students now on campus have not been to an Elon football game. What we're counting on is our spirit squads and our upper class students to really take the lead and show the first and second year students what a football game day is supposed to look like, what a basketball game day is supposed to look like. I know we're working with Phoenix Phanatics, our marketing staff is talking with them, but how do you change everything you didn't like to make it as exciting as you ever wanted it to be? These students at Elon's campus have the opportunity to really set the tone for what game day can be and how it can be a vibrant part of a student's experience.

Q: What is the Delta variant of COVID-19 a concern for athletics at this point? Is this something that Elon athletics is keeping an eye on?

A: All of the variants that have emerged or are likely to, we are watching that closely. While we're hopeful to compete in the full schedules this year, we also know it's a possibility that you could have games sporadically if the variant were to rear its head within our team or someone else's team. We are lucky at Elon University in that we are a highly vaccinated population, and then within athletics, we are also highly vaccinated. We are also aware that the teams we're competing against may have different rules or requirements than Elon, so we will continue to be cautious. The data last year suggests there was very little transmission during sport. That can obviously change with different variants, however, we still believe sport can be conducted safely.

Q: Last year, a big topic was how the mental health of everyone was affected by COVID-19 and with athlete specifically, competing in sports is a huge part of their college experience. Will there be continued support mentally for athletes who are maybe still getting over what they went through last year?

A: There was a great sense of mourning for student athletes who didn't get to complete their career on the court or on the field, no different than students who didn't get to complete their college career and walk across the stage. We want to be very mindful of balance in life, learning to accept the things we can control, and really having deliberate conversations with our student athletes about health and wellness. We have athletic trainers who work with all of our teams, and then we have a really strong relationship with the campus counseling center. I think we have a great system in place to react to the needs of our student athletes, but I also know that's something we look to improve upon every single year. We've watched what happened this summer with Simone Biles. I think it's a lot easier to have conversations when you see public figures address mental health and wellness very openly. What we have to do is be ready to receive those conversations, engage with our student athletes and walk a path together.

From the Leader:

Elon News Network’s Sports Director

At this time last year, there was a lot of uncertainty about sports at Elon University. Varsity athletic teams were on pause, while club and intramural sports were in limbo. Yet, student athletes and Elon staff members persevered and played through a pandemic, a truly remarkable feat.

Even in unprecedented circumstances, last year showed us all the undeniable power of sports, with Elon fans and students coming together to support the Phoenix’s teams and student athletes. We saw watch parties for Elon athletic events, energetic student sections at various games and our dedicated staff at Elon News Network covering athletics despite the unusual year. In a time when socializing is difficult, sports serve as a healing mechanism for so many Elon students and will continue to do so this year. They create a routine in a world where so little is normal anymore.

This past year has also shown us that the power of sports extends beyond the field. We have seen student athletes use their platform to create conversations about social change, mental health and name, image and likeness. We know that there is much more to covering sports than just wins and losses, and we hope to dive deep to better comprehend the sports world beyond the box scores.

This special edition of The Pendulum will introduce you to some amazing student athletes, all of whom we are excited to report on throughout this year. These athletes have spent the last year competing in some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. They represent our university in an incredible manner and deserve our attention.

I am proud to work with a staff at Elon News Network and together we will work to cover athletics whenever and however we can. Please contact me at jkisamore@elon.edu if you have any ideas, questions or comments. We are honored to serve the athletic community and tell your stories.