



CAA  
from cover

ness, with Elon heading to Harrisonburg, Virginia, and host James Madison University's gym as the No. 1 seed. The Phoenix will begin its title quest at noon Thursday against the winner of the 8/9 matchup of Towson University and Hofstra University. And, for head coach and CAA Coach of the Year Charlotte Smith, the team is ready to add to its trophy collection for 2016-2017.

"The telltale story will be how they come out and play, but I know they are definitely hungry for more," Smith said. "This is just one chapter of being a champion

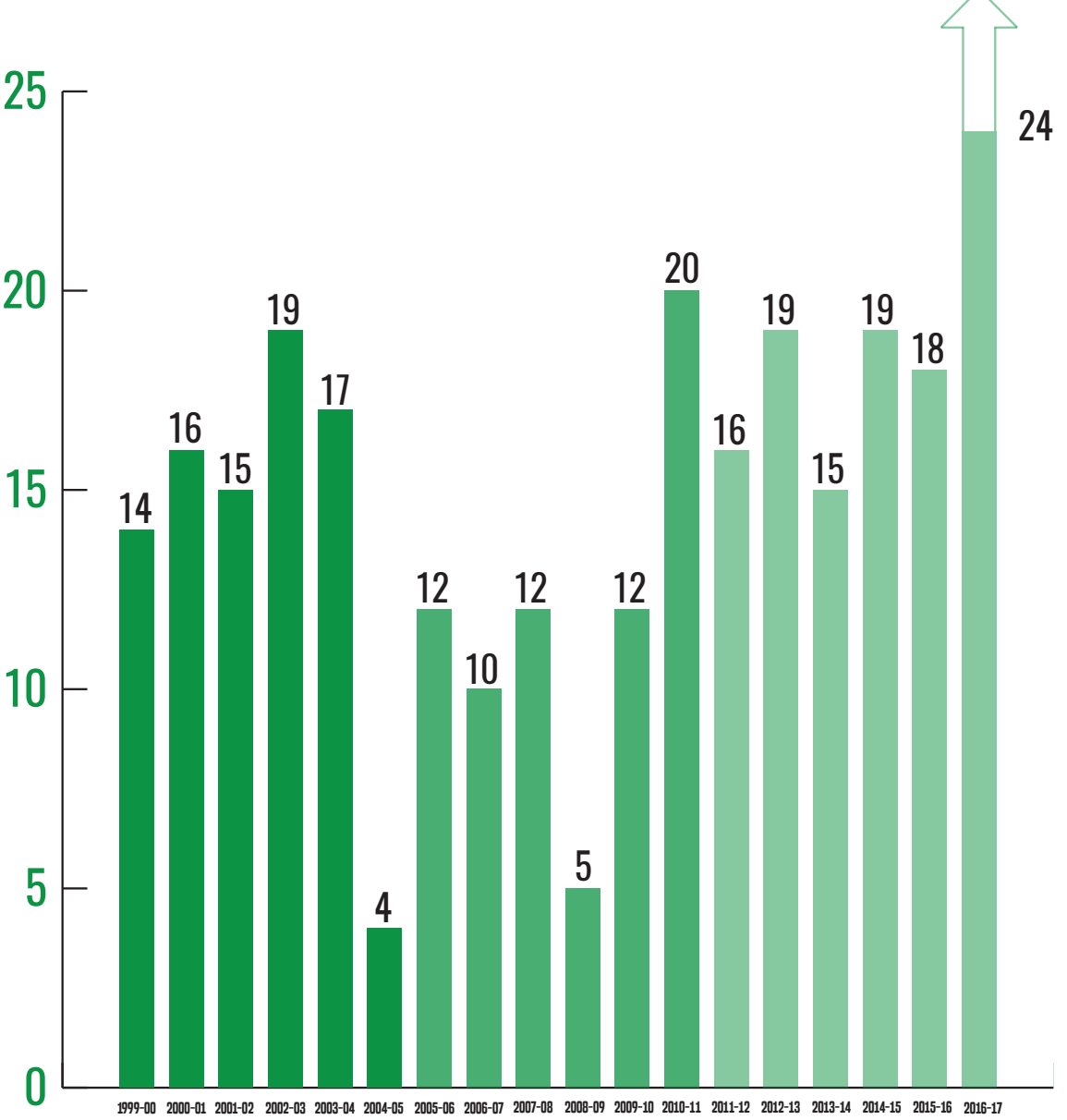
— there's more to the story, and a bigger part of the story is conference champions, because that defines whether or not you'll be in the Big Dance, for the most part."

Elon can assure its first bid to the NCAA Tournament by winning three games in a row. But while acknowledging it'd be "miraculous" if Elon got an at-large bid, Smith feels the Phoenix deserves to be in consideration.

"We played a very challenging nonconference schedule, and we have a great nonconference record," Smith said. "We were really competitive, and a couple of those games were in our grasp to take the W. We'll see, but playing those games gave our team a lot of

# PLAYING FOR THE

## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL WINS BY SEASON



91 DAYS SINCE LAST LOSS TO A NON-JMU TEAM

#28 IN REBOUNDS IN DIVISION I

11.1 THE NUMBER OF AVERAGE POINTS PER GAME THAT ELON OUTSCORED ITS OPPONENTS

DON'T GET ME WRONG. WE'RE SO EXCITED ABOUT THE CHAMPIONSHIP, BUT OUR GOAL IS TO WIN OUR CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT.

LAUREN BROWN  
GUARD

confidence. We've proven that we can hang with tough competition, which I think will make a great case for an at-large bid."

By the time the Phoenix plays its first game at the CAA Tournament, it'll have been three months since Elon lost to a non-James Madison opponent. Elon's RPI has consistently been in the Top 30 all season and currently is at 27, something Smith said comes from the players grasping the importance of each game.

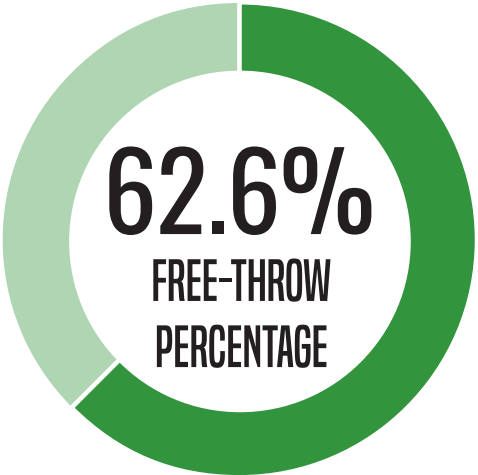
"They see the big picture, and they understand the big picture," Smith said. "We've talked about everything that goes into getting to that next level. They're understanding that stuff and they know that every win matters, and every

single game matters in regards to RPI, rankings, mid-major rankings. I think they understand the magnitude and importance of each game."

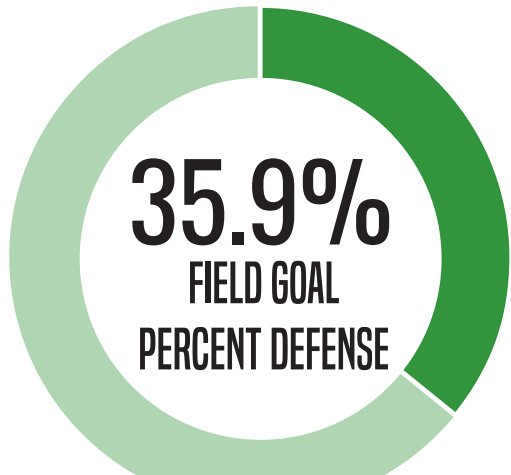
Smith believes all of that can be attributed to her five-woman senior class: Rhodes, who was selected to the All-CAA Third Team and guards Essence Baucom, Lauren Brown, Maddie McCallie and Lenaira Ruffin. In the coach's eyes, the word that embodies the group is "selfless."

"Our senior class is the foundation of this program, and they are the ones that have built what exactly it means to be a team," Smith said. "Lauren Brown was a starter her freshman year, and Maddie McCallie was a starter last

# BIG DANCE



Last in the CAA  
322nd in country

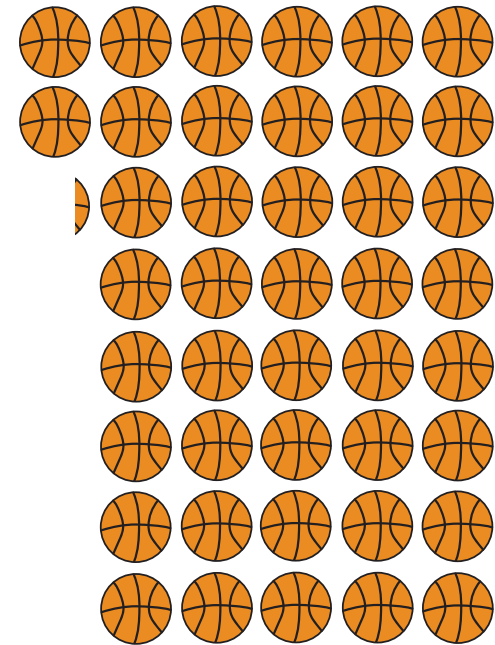


#1 in CAA  
#23 in D1

42.2 ELON'S REBOUNDS PER GAME

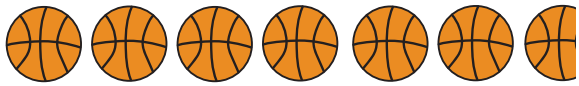
vs.

35.4 ELON OPPONENTS' REBOUNDS PER GAME



## WHICH MEANS

+ 6.7 ON AVERAGE, ELON GRABS 6.7 MORE REBOUNDS PER GAME THAN ITS OPPONENT



ALL STATISTICS CURRENT AS OF MARCH 6  
10 TEAMS IN CAA, 345 TEAMS IN NCAA  
ALEX TOMA AND HANNAH SICHERMAN | DESIGNERS



ALL PHOTOS BY ASHLEY KING | Staff Photographer  
Top left: Junior forward Malaya Johnson (44) shoots a mid-range jumper Jan. 20.  
Top right: Junior guard Shay Burnett (5) was named to the All-CAA First Team for the second straight year.  
Middle right: The Elon University women's basketball team meets at midcourt after clinching the CAA regular season title.  
Bottom right: Rhodes (left) and Baucom (right) celebrate with senior guard Lauren Brown (center) after Brown made a 3-pointer while getting fouled.  
Bottom left: Senior guards Maddie McCallie (far left) and Lenaira Ruffin (second from left) enjoy Elon's 82-48 victory March 1.

core group, the core seven, is just selfless, and they've been a great example for those to come of what it takes to build a championship team."

Elon has that championship now, but the only way Elon can guarantee its spot in the NCAA Tournament and achieve its larger ambition is to win the conference tournament. It's what Brown, who was named the Dean Ehlers Recipient — an award from the CAA given to the women's basketball player who "embodies the highest standards of leadership, integrity and sportsmanship in conjunction with his academic athletic achievement" — has always wanted.

"Don't get me wrong. We're

so excited about the championship, but our goal is to win our conference tournament," Brown said. "This is nice to have, but this is not our ultimate goal. Just staying focused on what we want to accomplish this year will be key for our success."

And, while the path to getting there may mean Elon has to beat James Madison in its build-uping Saturday night, the sixth-year head coach and first-time Coach of the Year trusts in her team to get it done.

"I am always confident in this team," Smith said. "I truly believe in this team. The most important thing is for them to believe in themselves and be confident in what they bring to the table."

I TRULY BELIEVE IN THIS TEAM. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS FOR THEM TO BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES AND BE CONFIDENT IN WHAT THEY BRING TO THE TABLE.

CHARLOTTE SMITH  
HEAD COACH

year. Both have gone from a starter to a nonstarter, so their roles have changed [at times], but their attitude hasn't. They've always been positive and been mindful of the greater good of the team, and that's been one of the biggest keys to our success."

Smith also sees her two star juniors — guard Shay Burnett, who was named to her second-straight All-CAA First Team, and forward Malaya Johnson — embodying that mindset.

"Shay is one of the most selfless people on the team — almost to a fault at times, because there are times where I want her to be more aggressive and I want her to look for her shot," Smith said. "Malaya's the same way. That