

# Following through on a PROMISE

The memory of a season-ending loss motivates women's tennis to follow through on last season's dream

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The loss of one match ended Elon University women's tennis teams' collective dream to make it to the conference title last year. The memory of losing to the College of William & Mary is keeping the team — especially head coach Elizabeth Anderson — motivated to achieve what last year's team couldn't.

Anderson said she doesn't want to forget how it felt to come that close but still fall short. She said she reminds herself of that match for one reason: motivation.

According to Anderson, athletes never forget those types of losses. She said it's important to look back and grow from it, a practice Anderson is trying to instill in the teams' three new players.



TEAM CULTURE FOR US IS WORKING HARD. IT'S JUST DOING ALL THE LITTLE THINGS RIGHT.

**ELIZABETH ANDERSON**  
HEAD COACH

"I think for them as players, also for me as a coach, it challenges you," Anderson said. "You want to be successful, and you want the team to do the best that they can. The toughest times are the times that you learn the most. You can grow the most also as a team."

Senior Alex Koniaev said she recognizes the mixed emotions from the girls who played William & Mary. The match came down to just one point, making some players feel as if they should've done more, while other players think of it with pride. But it's a match that, like Anderson, Koniaev said she tries to remember.

"I know some players on my team, even though they played really well, and had an amazing match, and an amazing win and other people didn't, some people kind of just try not to think about it because it was heartbreaking for them," Koniaev said. "For me, it was a good thing to sometimes look back at it because my level was so good in that match. Sometimes I want to think like, 'Oh, what was I doing there that made me so successful?'"

Anderson has been coaching the Phoenix for 16 years. She said this team's ability to face adversity stands out. Anderson said as a coach, she tries her best to push all her players to be the best they can be, but when she sees the players want it for themselves — as this team has — it makes her job that much easier.

"I think that separates the good teams and the great teams and the championship teams," Anderson said.

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specifically focused on team culture and chemistry, which she said is an important part of a team's makeup for a roster of eight players. However, culture and chemistry aren't the only points of emphasis for Anderson.

"Team culture for us is working hard. It's just doing all the little things right," Anderson said. "From a team chemistry standpoint, I think really enjoying playing for each other and enjoying building each other up and having a lot of really good excitement. They're cheering for each other and pumping each other up, and that, I think, has been really impressive to me this year."

The Phoenix ended last season with a 13-12 record and graduated three seniors. The team picked up three new players this year: two current freshmen, Shauna Galvin and Kiana Rizzolo, and a transfer from the University of South Carolina Upstate, sophomore Victoria Saldh.

Saldh has wasted no time making her mark at Elon, earning her first CAA Player of the Week in February.

"It hasn't been the easiest, as a transfer, to go from one school to another, and she just really embraced it," Koniaev said. "Playing next to her, I thrive off of her energy. I'm just really proud of how hard she competes in every single match that she plays."

Anderson said she

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**8**  
consecutive wins by the women's tennis team.

**4**  
of the last eight wins the team has won without conceding a point.

CLARE GRANT | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Sophomore Olivia Archer hits the ball back to a UNCW opponent at the Jimmy Powell Tennis Center on Saturday Feb. 22. The Phoenix won 5-2.

**UPCOMING GAMES**

**FRIDAY**  
**3/7**  
Elon vs. JMU  
AWAY @ 11 a.m.

**SUNDAY**  
**3/13**  
Elon vs. College of Charleston  
AWAY @ 2 p.m.

**FRIDAY**  
**3/10**  
Elon vs. Clemson  
HOME @ 5 p.m.

recognizes Saldh's talent and is excited to see her continue to grow.

"She's just an incredible competitor," Anderson said. "Victoria approaches every day as, 'I'm going to get better. Every day I'm locked into practice.' [She's] extremely coachable, just works really hard, and her game has really taken off."

The Phoenix has had to prove itself early, playing schools such as Duke University, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and East Carolina University in preseason play. The Phoenix was victorious over East Carolina but fell to UNC and Duke. Although the mentality stays the same for the Phoenix regardless of its opponent, Anderson said games like those are learning opportunities.

"We pick up on some different things that they may be doing that we want to do," Anderson said. "Their intensity level and their footwork, and they're really getting to the balls really well. I mean, they're very focused at that level. Sometimes some of it is a focus intensity level that separates it."

Though small in size, Anderson said every player will have her own role to play in hopes of making it to the championship game.

"This season is all about a journey. It's all about improving. You're just trying to continue to get better. Ultimately, our goal is to win the conference, but there's a lot of steps along the way," Anderson said. "I think just continuing to keep our focus on having the best culture that we can, having the best chemistry, having players continue working hard every single day — If we focus on those small things, then I think it will give us the best chance of getting where we want to go."

# DEFENDING the King's court

Men's tennis looks to repeat historic 2019 conference championship anchored by veteran leadership

Colby Cook | Elon News Network | @elonnewsnetwork



THE EARLY SIGNS OF spring also signal the beginning of the 2020 men's tennis season. The Phoenix looks to maintain its CAA Championship and make it to the NCAA tournament for the second consecutive season.

The road back to the NCAA tournament will not be an easy one. The Phoenix has already tackled the Research Triangle with games against two ranked teams, the North Carolina Tar Heels and the North Carolina State Wolfpack. The Phoenix has also played in Durham against Duke. The experience will likely serve as a meaningful practice for later in the season.



BUT HERE, IT'S DIFFERENT. IT'S A GROUP, SO IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU LOSE OR YOU WIN. IF THE TEAM WINS, IT'S POSITIVE FOR THE TEAM.

**CAMILO PONCE**  
JUNIOR

"We all know that what we're trying to do is peak in April," said Michael Leonard, men's tennis head coach. "We know there's a lot of potential in this team. ... We've got to get healthy, and we've got to continue to work hard. And we think if we can do that, then we can be in the hunt at the end of the season."

The tough tests at the beginning of the schedule were planned for Leonard, now in his 16th season at the helm of the Phoenix program, anchored by juniors Camilo Ponce and Kyle Frankel.

"We always try to stack a schedule. ... It's good to kind of get used to the highest caliber to kind of see where you stand," Leonard said. "I think it is good for our players, kids like Camilo and Kyle, to play against the best. They want that opportunity. ... They look forward to that opportunity."

Elon still has to play East Tennessee State, Virginia Commonwealth and the U.S. Naval Academy, all of which made the NCAA tournament last season. The Phoenix will also face off against conference foes William & Mary in Williamsburg, James Madison University in Harrisonburg and College of Charleston at the home at Jimmy Powell Tennis Center.

Ponce, hailing from Quito, Ecuador, is one of the older faces on the team. He said he looks to assist the younger players while building upon his stellar 2019 season. He was named All-CAA Second Team in doubles his sophomore season, and he won the championship-clinching match at the No. 5 position at the 2019 CAA Championships.

"I try to motivate them, push them hard and also have a good relationship with them, so they can hear me and also I can learn from them as well," Ponce said.

Ponce knows the team dynamic is at the core of the collegiate game. He said the team aspect of college matches differs from the tournaments he was used to.

"I was playing more international tournaments, and it's all by yourself. So you work for yourself. You are looking for results for yourself," Ponce said. "But here, it's different. It's a group, so it doesn't matter if you lose or you win. If the team wins, it's positive for the team."

Improvement is integral to success for Leonard as the Phoenix tries to reach the NCAA tournament for the second year in a row.

"Our goal is each day to try to get better and try to improve in each match," Leonard said. "You see a difference in our competitive nature and our ability to kind of fight through adversity and things of that nature."

Leonard said he is looking forward to the change of venue and the players' opportunity to travel together.

"I don't mind going the road some," Leonard said. "We've been [at Jimmy Powell] several years in a row. So, I'm actually looking forward to the guys traveling and being together."

It will be a difficult journey for the Phoenix if it wishes to repeat as CAA champions and return to the NCAA tournament, but Leonard said his staff is striving to maximize the team's potential.

"From my side, our objective as a team is to be — when we get to the conference tournament — be as competitive as we can and get the best we can give in the court. And hopefully, we can do that," Leonard said. "And get the championship, of course. But, it's a long path. Every match is going to help us improve."

**UPCOMING GAMES**

**WEDNESDAY**  
**3/4**  
Elon vs. College of Charleston  
HOME @ 3 p.m.

**SATURDAY**  
**3/7**  
Elon vs. Richmond  
HOME @ 1 p.m.

**TUESDAY**  
**3/10**  
Elon vs. Naval Academy  
HOME @ 3 p.m.

BEN MUISE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Junior Camilo Ponce practices his swing at the Jimmy Powell Tennis Center.

