

Elon Club Baseball defeats UNCG in Game One of Saturday Double-Header 9-6

By Matt Shiffman

Elon University Club Baseball bucked recent strikeout trends and instead put the ball in play consistently, spearheading a big offensive game one. Specifically in the bottom of the second inning, where Elon scored six runs on it's way to a 9-6 win in the first game of the Saturday double-header.

Elon did not strikeout in the inning. Instead, they put the ball in play, daring the UNCG defense to beat them by making plays in the field.

UNCG did not make the plays in the field.

The inning started with an error at shortstop. Then, a bunt by Elon Left Fielder Gavin Thomas that UNCG was unable to turn into an out. After UNCG was able to turn a ground ball to shortstop into an out, three straight errors by the Spartans. One by the second baseman, one by the shortstop, and one by the third baseman. The first two throwing errors on ground balls that both middle infielders should have completed into outs. After all three errors, Elon had gained a 3-0 advantage, solely on the back of putting the ball in play and forcing the UNCG defense to make a play.

The defense was not done shooting UNCG in the foot. Elon then loaded the bases for First Baseman Braden Iverson.

Iverson, a senior, blew the game open by finding the right-center field gap with a sharp line drive hit. The ball rolled all the way to the wall. By the time UNCG could get it in, all three

baserunners had crossed home, and Iverson was standing on third with a triple. The play game Elon a 6-0 lead they wouldn't relinquish.

When I asked third baseman Ryan Stradtman about putting the ball in play, he said, "Finally, dude. It [strikeouts] has been a big issue."

However, they did come close. UNCG slowly chipped away after Starting Pitcher Sam Howard was removed. Howard only pitched two innings, standard for the fall, as Elon tries to get as many pitchers tuned up as possible. The score was now 6-5 Elon going into the bottom of the fifth inning. Double header game days mean the games are only seven innings long, so this one was reaching its conclusion.

The Phoenix needed some insurance runs, and they got them. First, Second Baseman John McAllister blooped in an RBI single, then Center Fielder Caden Proctor lined a double down the right field line, scoring two more runs. It was 9-5 Elon.

UNCG was able to add a sixth run in the top of the sixth, but that was all. Justin Helberg, who started the day as the shortstop, came in to get the final three outs and the save.

Elon didn't do it with a ton of power, but instead by putting the ball in play, using those balls in play to score nine runs in the game one victory. Stradtman talked about how the conditions of the field lends itself to the putting the ball in play strategy.

"Playing here, at our field... you hit the ball on the ground, gotta make a guy make a play."