Eagle Nation,

I pray this note finds you and your family safe and healthy. It is hard to believe summer is officially upon us. This time last year we were in the midst of trying to figure out how we were going to have a football season along with preparing for the return of our student-athletes for offseason conditioning. There is excitement in the air as we return to a traditional summer schedule. Before we turn the page to the 2021-22 academic year, below are some 2020-21 points of pride that I wanted to share:

• Women's tennis and men's golf won a Sun Belt Championship this past year. The women's rifle squad captured the 2021 Southern Conference Smallbore Championship as well.

• The 2020 Georgia Southern football squad won eight games, including the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl over Louisiana Tech. The Eagles were one of two teams in the FBS to play 13 games in the COVID-19 season, joining Alabama who had to use three postseason games to get to that number.

• Sean McCaffrey (women's tennis) and Carter Collins (men's golf) were named Sun Belt Coach of the Year while Colin Vest was named the CCSA Diving Coach of the Year.

• The Georgia Southern student-athletes continued to excel in the classroom during the fall 2020 semester as 11 of the programs earned a 3.0 or higher for the fall semester. Overall, 282 student-athletes earned a place on the Honor Roll (3.0 or higher). Of that group, 98 made the Dean's List (3.50-3.99) and 80 made the President's List for earning a perfect 4.0 semester GPA. The 3.07 department GPA is the highest fall GPA on record.
• In the spring, the 15 programs combined to record a 3.00 department GPA. Eleven teams recorded a 3.00 or higher while 252 student-athletes made the Honor Roll, including 80 in the President's List for a 4.00 and 72 more who made the Dean's List (3.50-3.99). The 3.04 department GPA for the year marked the fifth time in the past six years GS student-athletes have recorded a 3.00 or higher for the academic year.

• In the latest report, eight of the department's programs recorded a perfect single-year Athletic Performance Rate (APR) score, three GS teams posted or tied their highest multi-year scores ever. The graduation success rate mark, another metric used by the NCAA, continues to climb to all-time highs.

• Georgia Southern saw 16 student-athletes graduate in the fall and 54 more in the spring.

• Total development of the student-athlete is a top priority as evidenced by the "APEX" program, which strives to help student-athletes build skills necessary to compete in the job market upon graduation. The first-of-these-kind seminars include topics such as resume writing, interviewing, career exploration, dinner etiquette, life after graduation and networking skills.

• Four Georgia Southern student-athletes earned All-America honors in the 2020-21 academic year. Long snapper Ryan Langan and defensive end Raymond Johnson III were honored from football while Nick Jones and Mason McWhorter of the baseball team were also honored.

• The Georgia Southern Athletic Foundation had a record-breaking fundraising year (more information forthcoming in July). The Foundation launched the Erk Russell Fund with donations directly benefitting academic scholarships available to student-athletes at Georgia Southern. The department also launched "Soar to Six" with the goal of having 6,000 members of the Erk Russell Fund.

• The Georgia Southern Athletic Foundation re-launched the popular Eagle Club Tour in the spring. Coaches and administrators from the department made 17 stops across the state and region to packed houses as they updated Eagle Nation about the exciting things happening in Statesboro.

On a separate note, we had the pleasure of introducing a new softball and women's golf coach to Eagle Nation here recently. Sharon Perkins comes to Statesboro with a 290-198 overall record in seven seasons with Georgia Tech (2007-13). Under Perkins' leadership, Georgia Tech won three Atlanta Coast Conference (ACC) championships and advanced to NCAA postseason play six times. She was also a three-time ACC Coach of the Year. Since 2013, she has coached travel ball in the Atlanta area (Atlanta Premier-Perkins), one of Georgia's most talented 14-U first-year teams. She also worked with well over 100 of the Greater Atlanta area's top youth players through individual and team workouts.

Mimi Burke comes to Statesboro on the heels of having coached in five consecutive NCAA Women's Golf Regionals. She spent the last four seasons at the University of Georgia, most recently winning the NCAA Columbus Regional to advance to the NCAA Finals for the first time since 2016 as Georgia entered the finals ranked 11th in the country by GolfStat. Burke also helped lead Purdue to two consecutive NCAA Regional bids as an assistant coach in 2016 and 2017. Prior to entering the coaching realm, Burke worked with the PGA's Valero Texas Open in San Antonio, where she coordinated the PGA Tour event's Executive Women's Day, developed the player
handbook, and oversaw player activities with local companies.

I am excited to share that we are progressing toward completing our strategic planning exercise in the next several weeks. I look forward to sharing a completed plan for the next five years (2021-26) in the near future! In closing, in order for Georgia Southern to reach its desired goals, I will continue to strategically highlight three (3) things that individuals and companies can do to help us:

1. Buy season tickets and create a home-field advantage
2. Financially support the Athletic Foundation and the Erk Russell Fund
3. Get others to do the same!

Our Athletic Ticket Office is ready to assist you in purchasing tickets and can be reached at 1-800-GSU-WINS or via email at tickets@georgiasouthern.edu. For those wishing to donate, please go to: Give.GSEagles.com.

Our best days are ahead and I look forward to an exciting 2021!

Hail Southern and GATA!

Jared Benko
Georgia Southern Director of Athletics
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Donors and ticket buyers are vital to funding every Georgia Southern athletic program and student-athlete on and off the field.

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All sales are final. No refunds, no exchanges. Dates, times and locations are subject to change. Ticketed events adhere to a Clear Bag Policy. Ticket prices include sales tax but not processing/shipping fees. If events are changed or cancelled due to COVID-19 options will be made available to purchasers of the event or season.

In the event of weather implications, Georgia Southern Athletics will make announcements on GSEagles.com and social media accounts /GS Athletics (twitter and facebook).

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