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Georgia Southern University



Men's Golf Thrives on Prep and Process

The Eagles open the spring at the Gator Invitational Saturday.

Marc Gignac

Men's Golf

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STATESBORO – Some folks find it boring or monotonous, get frustrated or simply do not have the patience to get through it, but for the Georgia Southern men's golf program, preparation and process are its heartbeat.

Focusing on preparation and the process has served the Eagles well as the team placed in the top-5 of three of its four tournaments in the fall and won the AutoTrader Collegiate Classic. In addition, Eagles placed in the top-5 on the individual leaderboard five times, in the top-10 six times and in the top-20 nine times.

Maintaining that recipe of success is what the Eagles will lean on as they face a daunting spring schedule, which begins Saturday at the Gator Invitational in Gainesville, Fla. It is the 17th straight season that the Eagles have played at the Gator.

"The focus that we have this spring is going through the process every week and taking it week by week. This team loves competition and loves competing against the best," said Georgia Southern coach [Carter Collins](#). "So we're looking forward to challenging ourselves by playing a tough schedule this spring. We'll get what we deserve in the end, we just have to work hard for it."

Georgia Southern will use the same lineup as it used throughout the fall as [Steven Fisk](#), [Jake Storey](#), [Archer Price](#), [Brett Barron](#) and [Luukas Alakulppi](#) will make the start Saturday. [Avery Price](#), a freshman who tied for eighth in the GS Individual Collegiate two weeks ago, earned an individual slot.

The Eagles have traditionally fared well at the Gator, which is contested among one of the hardest fields of the year. This year's tournament will be no different as fourteen top-100 teams will be there, including sixth-ranked Vanderbilt and the seventh-ranked and tournament host Gators. The Mark Bostick Golf Course rewards accuracy off the tee and into the green.

"They have a lot of push-up greens so you have to be very accurate with your iron shots, and if you miss greens, you have some very difficult ups and downs," said Collins. "I feel like our short game and course management are strengths of this team, so as long as we trust our strengths around this course, it will open itself up to you. We're capable of accomplishing what we want this week; we just have to be disciplined and focused each round and throughout the event."

The Eagles will look to round into peak form as they progress through the spring and set their sights on April's Sun Belt Championship and a possible 25th NCAA appearance. One tweak to be made from the fall is to keep their concentration throughout each tournament and trust the preparation they put in ahead of time.

"The one thing we're looking to improve on in the spring is to maintain focus throughout the event," said Collins. "This team works very hard leading up to the event and

in the practice rounds, and I think we need to do a better job just letting it go during the tournament and getting out of our own way and let all of hard work pay off for us."

Another improvement to be made is in par-5 scoring. Collins broke down tournament results in the fall and noted that typically, the teams which finished in the top-5 were almost always in the top-5 in par-5 scoring and vice versa at the bottom of the leaderboard. The Eagles will look to improve their par-5 scoring this spring.

"Some of it can be course management. When you hit a tee ball into a rough place, even though you may want to be aggressive understanding 'let me just get the ball back in play and be aggressive on my next shot' may be the smartest play," said Collins. "That logic may not help you make birdie but it will eliminate the bogeys and the doubles, and that will help a lot on par-5s."

The 39th playing of the Schenkel Invitational, hosted by Georgia Southern and the Schenkel Committee at Forest Heights Country Club is slated for March 16-18. Consistently one of the best tournaments in the country, the 2017 edition was ranked as the 12th toughest regular-season tournament of the spring in the country by Golfweek.

"This upcoming year's Schenkel is hosting another great field, thanks to Committee Chair Chad Avret and the Schenkel Committee. The committee has always worked hard to continue to build the Schenkel in the right direction, and it shows year to year." said Collins. "There's just a feel around the tournament similar to The Masters in Augusta. I think teams respond well to that and that's one of the reasons they keep coming back. When you look at all the major champions and PGA tour champions that have played in the Schenkel, it just shows you the caliber of competition that comes into Statesboro every year to play Forest Heights. It's just the best event in college golf and we are proud to be a part of it."

The Sun Belt Championship returns to the Raven Golf Course in Sandestin, Fla., for the fourth straight season. The Eagles won it in 2015, struggled in 2016 and advanced to the championship round of match play last year. Four players in the lineup this week have played the course, and three have played it multiple times. Adding match play to the mix was a wrinkle that was instituted in 2016 and can turn the event into a physically and mentally draining endeavor.

"Making sure your shots are coming from the fairway and you can be aggressive once you get the ball where it's supposed to be," said Collins. "If you don't do that, you wind up playing that course from your heels, and it's a tough place to play from your heels. There are times, especially with the combined stroke play and match play, you've got so much pressure and competition built into one event, but it's important to stay level-headed and focused because it's such a long week."

Fisk and Storey tied for first in the individual standings at last year's Sun Belt Championship and Fisk got the better of Storey in the playoff to take medalist honors. However, Storey went on to win Sun Belt Player of the Year honors. The two veterans have developed a healthy rivalry, which pushes each other to be better and also helps raise the level of the team.

"There's tons of mutual respect between Jake and Steven," said Collins. "Any time you have two guys fighting at that elite level, it pulls everyone else to them because they see what they are doing and they want to be a part of it. If you get the whole team buying into something like that, you can do something special."

The Eagles set some rather lofty goals prior to the beginning of the fall portion of the campaign and the results of the fall justified the internal expectations. For now, the key is to rely on the beloved preparation and process.

"We have boxes we want to check by the end of the year, but we cannot check those boxes if we do not prepare hard and execute the best we can so that's all our focus is on," said Collins.

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