Women’s Golf Season Preview: Eagles Ready to Take the Next Step

Georgia Southern University

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Tournament Name: Lady Paladin Invitational
Host: Furman
Location: Greenville, S.C.
Dates: Sept. 21-23
Course: Furman University Golf Course
Par: 72 (6,278 yards)
Format: 54 holes (18 each day)

Tee Times: Sept. 21 and 22 - tee times at 9 a.m. off #1 and #10. Sept. 23 - shotgun start at 9 a.m.

Field (17): Augusta, Coastal Carolina, Daytona State, Florida Gulf Coast, Furman, Georgia State, Georgia Southern, James Madison, Kansas, Kansas State, Kennesaw State, Memphis, North Florida, Old Dominion, South Florida, Texas Tech, Tulsa

Women’s Golf Season Preview: Eagles Ready to Take the Next Step
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Women's Golf
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STATESBORO – The Georgia Southern women's golf team will begin its fourth season at the Lady Paladin Invitational this Friday, and the tournament runs through Sunday at the Furman Golf Course.

GS returns six letterwinners, including All-Sun Belt selection Ella Ofstedahl, from last year's team that placed third at the Sun Belt Championship, the best finish in school history. The returners gained more experience playing a number of events in the summer, and with three talented freshmen added to the mix, the Eagles are looking to take the next step in development of the program.

"I think they came back really understanding where they had improved and then the next things they want to improve on," said Georgia Southern coach Emily Kuhfeld. "They have done a good job preparing, and practices have really been great. They have been very focused, and the team dynamics are very solid."

The lineup for the Furman tournament was determined through a qualifying, and Georgia Southern will use the same five student-athletes who played in last year's Sun Belt Championship – Ansley Bowman, Julianna Collett, Sarah Noonan, Natalie Petersen and Ofstedahl.

Bowman ranked second on the team with 76.87 scoring average, played in all 11 tournaments last year and posted two top-10 and three top-15 finishes. She is the lone senior on the roster and the first four-year senior in program history. Needless to say, her leadership is invaluable.

"Ansley has grown a lot as a golfer, a person and a leader and that process continues, but she really is such an enthusiastic supporter and leader and really believes in our program," said Kuhfeld. "She means a lot to us, and she has been putting in a lot of good hard work and bringing everybody along with her. It's really great to have leadership like that."

Collett competed in all six events in the spring, posted a 78.11 scoring average and was the co-leader of the Sun Belt Championship after shooting a 71 in the first round, her lowest of the season. She is now designated a redshirt sophomore after earning a medical redshirt for an injury that cut short her rookie campaign.

"Jules got the medical redshirt, which is awesome, and she has worked hard and made a lot of improvement," said Kuhfeld. "Her ball flight has gotten a lot better and straighter, and she's gained some distance too."

Noonan played in all 11 tournaments and tied for the team lead with 32 rounds. The sophomore's best finish was a tie for seventh in the Terrier Intercollegiate.

"Sarah switched swing coaches and has improved her ball striking a ton," said Kuhfeld. "I think this is going to be a really good year for her. She's worked really hard, and we've already
seen a lot of improvement with that change.”

Ofstedahl ranked 13th in the Sun Belt and led the Eagles with a 76.03 scoring average, which ranks third best in program history. The junior posted six top-20 finishes and had three top-10s, including two in a row in the spring, en route to earning second-team All-Sun Belt accolades.

"Ella worked really hard last year, improved a ton and has just continued to expect those scores and expect that kind of performance out of herself," said Kuhfeld. "It's been nice to see her elevate her game last year and then hold herself to those standards."

Petersen played in all 11 tournaments and tied for the team lead with 32 rounds. The sophomore posted three top-20 finishes and five top-30 outings, while ranking third on the team with a 77.12 scoring average.

"Natalie has gotten some good team experience over the summer and played in a lot of match-play events, and I think that helps her," said Kuhfeld. "She is maturing and being more tactical in going for pins so her course management has gotten better.”

Autumn Gabey joined the team as a sophomore and competed in one event. Now a junior, she will look to use that year of experience to push for more playing time this year.

"Autumn has been working hard, and we have seen a lot of flashes of good things with her in qualifying," said Kuhfeld. "She just needs to put it all together."

Freshmen Emma Bell, Kaysie Harrelson and Savanah Satterfield put together some great stretches in qualifying, and all three are likely to see time in the lineup this season.

"I know that they are working hard, and we have seen improvements in the short time that they have been here," said Kuhfeld. "It's just about putting everything together and then letting themselves go play. I could tell by watching qualifying there were some nerves, and they just need that experience."

The event at Furman has become a traditional starting point for the Eagles, and this will be the third time they have competed there. Kuhfeld says it serves as a good barometer on where the team is early in the year and likes that there is a window after the first two events that the team will use to make modifications for the final two tournaments of the fall.

"They are doing everything they can to prepare so it's awesome to have two back-to-back opportunities and then kind of take stock as to where we are, make adjustments and continue with the fall," said Kuhfeld.

The Eagles have learned over the past few seasons that not too much good can happen on a golf course when players are nervous and tight. Trusting their preparation and turning it loose became a key to their success last season and remains so this year.

"I feel like the GSU course is very adequate preparation for this event so I think our goal is to be relaxed and play free," said Kuhfeld. "We're prepared; let's just go play."

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