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The Eagles play their final three regular-season games on the road

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Frank Fortune

The Eagles play their final three regular-season games on the road.

STATESBORO, Ga. – Kevin Hervey scored a career-high 28 points and added 13 rebounds, and UTA shot 51 percent to get past Georgia Southern 81-71 in a Sun Belt men's basketball contest Monday night in Hanner Fieldhouse.

Ike Smith led Georgia Southern (17-11, 10-5) with 27 points on 10-of-17 shooting, including four 3-pointers. *Tookie Brown* scored 15, and *Devonte Boykins* hit all four of his 3-point shots and contributed a season-high 12 points.

Hervey tied a career high with five 3-pointers and had his 11th double-double of the season for UTA (21-6, 11-3), which won its fifth straight and maintained sole possession of first place in the conference standings. Jorge Bilbao scored 16 points with eight boards, and Erick Neal chipped in 11 points and four assists.

The story

Boykins hit his fourth 3-pointer of the game to put the Eagles ahead 63-61, but UTA

stormed back with a 14-4 run and opened a 75-65 cushion on a long Hervey triple with 3:49 to go. Bilbao scored the first eight of the stretch by taking advantage of the Eagles inside for three buckets and adding a pair of free throws.

Brown was fouled on a 3-point try on the Eagles' next trip down the floor and sank all three, but that was as close as GS would get. Hervey drilled another triple from almost the same spot, and UTA held the Eagles scoreless until a Brown 3-pointer with 44 seconds left.

UTA outrebounded the Eagles 42-23 and outscored them 32-16 in the paint.

Quotables from coach Mark Byington

"Sometimes, when you lose a game like that, you're sitting there and you start thinking about your team, but I think a lot of credit goes to UTA. They played great, they made shots all over the court and we couldn't stop them. That was how the game kind of went and for the most part, they couldn't stop us either. But they settled in and got some stops. The discouraging thing was that we didn't show enough toughness in rebounding and competing on the glass. We knew it was going to be that type of game. But we kind of see where things are. They were preseason top of the league and they are right there now, and we're seeing how good we have to get if we want to win this thing."

"The main problem of this game was when the ball went up, we didn't box them out. Hervey is Preseason Player of the Year and very good, but he got seven offensive rebounds. Bilbao got five, and honestly, that was the game - the fact that those guys were tougher than us and got to the glass and we had no answer for that."

On Boykins

"The guys did a good job of finding him, and he was ready to shoot and shot with confidence. He made one early that - you could kind of see his confidence rise when he made that first one. And he shot all good shots too. He picked us up. We needed Devonte to do that to have a chance, and he gave us a chance."

Next up

The Eagles finish out the season on the road, starting with a swing through Arkansas. Georgia Southern plays at Arkansas State Saturday (Feb. 25) and at Little Rock Monday (Feb. 27).

The 2017 Sun Belt Conference Men's and Women's Basketball Championships are scheduled for a week of March Madness in the Big Easy. New Orleans will once again be home to the two championships that will take place at Lakefront Arena from March 7-12 and ticket books can now be purchased from the Georgia Southern ticket office. For more information, visit the Sun Belt Conference's championship central websites - Men's Championship – Women's Championship – and be sure to follow the #FunBelt on social media - @SunBelt.

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