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STATESBORO, GA. - Georgia Southern Baseball dropped a narrow 4-3 decision to Georgia on Friday night to open a three-game series with the Bulldogs. A three-run third inning for the Bulldogs turned around an early Georgia Southern lead as the visitors drew first blood in the series. Game two is set for Saturday afternoon at 3 p.m. and can be seen live on ESPN3.

That game is typical of what you see on Friday nights in college baseball," said Head Coach Rodney Hennon. "Usually they are going to be tight ballgames and little things usually are the difference in games like this. There were a couple of plays in the outfield that we've got to make to play at this level and we helped them out. I thought they had a good approach against Evan Challenger with some hard hit balls, but we helped them out."
Georgia Southern got two runs in the second as the Eagles punished Georgia for a leadoff walk. C.J. Brazil singled to center, but the ball was misplayed by the centerfielder, allowing Tyler Martin to score from second. Mitchell Golden recorded an RBI single two batters later to give starting pitcher Evan Challenger an early advantage.

That advantage turned quickly in the third inning as Will Campbell hit a leadoff home run to cut the lead in half. Two singles bookended an error by the left fielder to account for two more runs as Georgia took a 3-2 lead.

Challenger would leave the game after just three innings, charged with three runs, two earned off eight hits. The senior lefty was saddled with the loss in his 2017 debut to fall to 0-1 on the year.

Georgia Southern's bullpen took over with Adam Kelly working two innings with one hit allowed, followed by Jacob Condra-Bogan's three innings of two-hit ball with four strikeouts. A single and a double to Adam Sasser and Will Proctor gave the visitors an important insurance run in the eighth off Condra-Bogan.

The Eagles got a leadoff single up the middle against a heavy shift in the home half of the eighth. An error by the Bulldogs opened the door for Cleveland to score on C.J. Brazil's RBI sacrifice fly. Two runners, however, were stranded in the frame as Georgia Southern left nine runners aboard in the game.

After a clean ninth inning from Landon Hughes, the Eagles were quickly in business when Logan Baldwin worked a leadoff walk. He moved along with Evan McDonald's sacrifice bunt and reached third with a single to left by Jordan Wren.

With runners on the corners, Georgia called on Tucker Bradley out of the bullpen against the heart of the Georgia Southern lineup. Bradley took the save with two strikeouts to close out the game. In total, Georgia struck out 14 Georgia Southern batters on the night.

"We could have executed better at the plate, but we struck out way too much," added Hennon. "We've got to do a better job of putting the ball in play and being able to put pressure on the defense. I though the bullpen did a great job, all those guys came in and did their job and it gave us a chance late. Credit to Georgia, they made some big pitches late and got some big punch outs to close it out."

Georgia Southern and Georgia return to Jack Stallings Field at J.I. Clements Stadium for Saturday's second game of the series starting at 3 p.m. There will be a pregame ceremony at 2:35 p.m. to recognize donors who helped make the upgrades at J.I. Clements Stadium a reality. The game can be seen live on ESPN3 with radio coverage on the Georgia Southern Sports Network.

Georgia Southern Athletics provides up-to-date information on all its sports through its official website, GSEagles.com, through social media channels facebook.com/GSAthletics, twitter.com/GSAthletics, iOS app Georgia Southern Eagles and Android app Eagles GATA.
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