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Frank Fortune

## Smith Tallies Double-Double, Men's Basketball Guts out Road Win

*The Eagles move into a tie for second with Georgia State in the Sun Belt standings.*

**JONESBORO, Ark.** — Ike Smith tallied 21 points, 10 rebounds and a pair of assists, and Georgia Southern held Arkansas State to 33 percent shooting to earn a hard-fought 72-60 Sun Belt men's basketball victory Saturday night in the Convocation Center.

Georgia Southern moved into a tie with Georgia State for second in the Sun Belt standings, a half game ahead of the Red Wolves. The top four teams earn a bye in the upcoming Sun Belt Tournament.

Tookie Brown scored 17 points for Georgia Southern (18-11, 11-5), and Shawn O'Connell scored eight. B.J. Gladden scored five points and corralled eight rebounds, and Mike Hughes collected

nine points, five rebounds and two assists. The victory broke a four-game road losing skid for the Eagles.

Devin Carter had 15 points, four rebounds and three steals to lead Arkansas State (19-9, 10-5), which fell at home for the first time this season. Deven Simms posted 12 points and four rebounds, and Rashad Lindsey scored nine.

### **The story**

The score was tied 46-46 in the second half when the Eagles opened some breathing room with an 11-2 run. Hughes made a 3-pointer from the wing in transition that made the score 57-48 with 9:52 to go, and Gladden extended the margin to 11 with a couple free throws before the Red Wolves made a couple runs.

Arkansas State trimmed the deficit to eight points five times, but the Eagles answered the bell every time. A free throw by Carter made the score 67-60 with 1:39 to play, but Smith hit a free throw at the other end. Georgia Southern got a defensive stop, and the Eagles broke the Red Wolves' full-court pressure defense as Hughes fed Smith for a dunk with 55.6 seconds remaining.

### **Quotables**

#### **Sophomore Ike Smith**

"Arkansas State is a well-coached team and a physical team, and we knew we were going to need toughness to pull this game out, especially with defensive rebounding."

"When teams hit us in the jaw first, we have to retaliate and punch them back and with some of our tough losses, we didn't punch them back. Toughness is going to be a key to getting wins the rest of the way."

#### **Head coach Mark Byington**

"It was a lot of guts, it was intense, we showed toughness and for me, it's probably one of the best five wins since I've been at Georgia Southern. Just coming in this building where no one else has won and this late in the season in an important game, and we didn't hide from it. We told the guys it was important and what we have to do. I thought for the last 72 hours we had a good way about us. We took a hard loss against UTA, who is obviously good, but we didn't play the right way. We came in tonight, played the right way, played with guts and played hard and we beat a good team. I'm really, really proud of the guys."

### **Next up**

The Eagles play at Little Rock Monday night with tipoff set for 9 p.m. ET. The contest can be seen live on the American Sports Network and ESPN3.

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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