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## Men's Basketball Preview: Eagles Take on Little Rock Monday Night

Georgia Southern University

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# Men's Basketball Preview: Eagles Take on Little Rock Monday Night

*The game can be seen live on American Sports Network and ESPN3.*

Marc Gignac



Men's Basketball | 2/26/2017 2:16:00 PM

## Story Links

**Georgia Southern (18-11, 11-5) at Little Rock (13-15, 4-11)**  
**Monday, Feb. 27 - Jack Stephens Center (5,600) – Little Rock, Ark. - 9 p.m. ET**  
**Television: American Sports Network and [ESPN3](#)**

[Live Video](#) | [Live Audio](#) | [Live Stats](#)

**Radio:** WMCD 107.3 FM (Statesboro), 105.5 FM WIFO (Jesup), 100.9 FM WLYU (Lyons), 103.7 FM WBMZ (Metter), 900 AM WJLG (Savannah)

**Series Record:** GS leads 16-14, L2

**Last meeting:** W, L, 75-61, 2/16/16 (Hanner)

**Probable Starters:**

#2 [Mike Hughes](#)

#3 [Ike Smith](#)

#4 [Tookie Brown](#)

#5 [B.J. Gladden](#)

#14 [Coye Simmons](#)

**Georgia Southern Information:**

[\[Stats \(PDF\)\]](#) [\[Roster\]](#) [\[Schedule\]](#) [\[Game Notes \(PDF\)\]](#)

**Little Rock Information:**

[\[Stats\]](#) [\[Roster\]](#) [\[Schedule\]](#)

### Setting the Scene

- Georgia Southern continues a three-game road trip to finish the season at defending Sun Belt champion Little Rock Monday night.
- The game will be broadcast live on the American Sports Network and ESPN3.
- It's the first and only regular-season meeting between Georgia Southern and Little Rock.
- The Eagles are tied with Georgia State for second place in the Sun Belt standings, a half game ahead of Arkansas State. The top four teams get a bye in the upcoming Sun Belt Tournament March 8-12 in New Orleans. The Eagles control their own destiny and can earn a bye by winning one of their final two contests. Two victories would guarantee no worse than a second-place finish.
- GS is 2-3 in its last five and coming off a 72-60 win at Arkansas State. It was the Red Wolves' first home loss of the season and broke a four-game road losing streak for the Eagles. GS is 14-6 in its last 20 contests.
- The Eagles are in a stretch in which they finish the season with five of their last seven games on the road.
- Georgia Southern is 6-9 on the road this season and 3-4 in road league games. The Eagles are 1-4 in their last five on the road.
- Georgia Southern features the Sun Belt's top two scorers in sophomores [Ike Smith](#) (19.8 ppg) and [Tookie Brown](#) (18.0 ppg). They were the third-highest freshman scoring duo in the country last year (1-Rice's Marcus Evans and Marquez Letcher-Ellis, 2- FSU's Dwayne Bacon and Malik Beasley).
- Little Rock is 1-4 in its last five and coming off a 71-54 home loss to Georgia State Saturday evening. It was the Trojans' first game in eight days.
- The Trojans' last four losses have come against teams in the top-5 of the Sun Belt standings.
- Little Rock is 8-6 at home and 3-5 in home league games.
- The Trojans lead the Sun Belt in free-throw percentage with a mark of .733.

### **The Series vs. Little Rock**

- This will be the 31st meeting in the all-time series, which began in 1988.
- Georgia Southern leads it 16-14 but was swept by the Trojans last season.
- The Eagles won both games in 2014-15, and those contests were the first in the series since the 1990-91 season, when both schools were members of the TAAC.
- Prior to last season, three of the last five meetings had been decided by five points or less.
- The Eagles are 6-8 against the Trojans on the road.

### **More Team Storylines**

- Georgia Southern has no seniors in its rotation and starts three sophomores and two juniors. Walk-ons [James Holder](#) and [Dominique Bullock](#) are the team's lone seniors.
- GS is averaging 77.9 points a game this season, the most since the 2004-05 campaign, when the Eagles scored at an 80.8 clip. The Eagles have scored over 80 12 times, including six straight games from 12/20-1/14, and have scored over 90 five times, including two in a row Jan. 21 and 23. It's the first time the Eagles scored 90-plus points in back-to-back Division I games since Feb. 11 and Feb. 13, 2006.
- Georgia Southern ranks 67th nationally and second in the Sun Belt in fewest turnovers and ranks 43rd nationally and second in the SBC and 59th in the country in turnovers per game. The Eagles have logged single-digit turnovers in eight games and posted a season-low six vs. Troy (1/7).
- The Eagles started 7-0 in league play for the first time since the 1991-92 campaign. GS won its first nine games in the Trans America Athletic Conference that year.
- GS posted an eight-game win streak from Dec. 2-Jan. 23. It's the Eagles' longest since the 2005-06 season.
- Three Eagles have been named Sun Belt Player of the Week - [Tookie Brown](#) (Jan. 3), [Ike Smith](#) (Jan. 24) and [Mike Hughes](#) (Feb. 7).
- GS is ranked 22nd in this week's CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top-25.
- Georgia Southern's top-3 seasons in 3-pointers made and attempted have all come during [Mark Byington](#)'s tenure. GS ranks first in the SBC in threes per game (9.3) and 31st in the country this season, and the Eagles have made 10 or more threes 14 times.
- The Eagles won their first two conference road games for the first time since the 2002-03 season.
- The Eagles have shot 50 percent or better in a half in 20 games this season, including 60 percent or better three times. The Eagles have shot 50 percent or better in both halves of a game twice (GSU, 12/31 and CCU, 1/23). The Eagles have shot 50 percent or better in six games.
- GS ranks third in the Sun Belt in made free throws and second in free-throw attempts. The Eagles have attempted 30-plus free throws in six games and made 20-plus free throws in seven contests.
- GS has a combined record of 34-16 in Sun Belt games played in January and February since joining the league in 2014-15.
- Georgia Southern returned all five starters and 11 lettermen from last season's squad. Ninety-four percent of the Eagles' scoring and rebounding is back in uniform.
- Georgia Southern was picked fourth in the Sun Belt Preseason Coaches Poll, [Tookie](#)

Brown was named preseason first-team all-league and Mike Hughes earned second-team honors.

- Mark Byington is coaching in his 137th career game today and his 126th at Georgia Southern. His 51 wins in his first three seasons at Georgia Southern are the best of any coach in the modern era. He posted a 7-4 record at College of Charleston in 2012, filling in as the interim coach for Bobby Cremins.
- Under Mark Byington, Georgia Southern is 48-9 in games when leading at half and 58-4 when leading with five minutes to go.
- Georgia Southern is 33-8 in Hanner Fieldhouse in its last 41 contests there and 40-14 under Mark Byington.
- GS has reached double digit wins in conference play in each of its three seasons in the Sun Belt.
- Since joining the Sun Belt in 2014, 27 Georgia Southern games against Sun Belt schools have been decided by five points or less, and the Eagles are 19-8.
- The Eagles are 26-3 in Sun Belt games when leading at halftime. GS is 27-0 when leading with five minutes to go.
- Georgia Southern's comeback from 16 points down at ULM (1/16) is the Eagles' largest since a 17-point rally vs. UTA March 5, 2015.
- GS finished the non-conference portion of its schedule with a 7-6 record, its first winning record in non-conference play since 2014-15 when the Eagles went 8-3. It's just the second time in the last eight seasons that the Eagles were above .500 in non-conference games.
- Georgia Southern played six non-conference games against five teams that are currently in the top-110 in the NCAA RPI (Akron - 53, FGCU - 86, Minn - 16, NC State - 110, Winthrop - 78). Sun Belt leader UTA is 35.
- The Eagles played 10 of their first 12 games away from home. The stretch ended Dec. 20 at Winthrop, which also capped a four-game road trip that covered 4,120 miles of travel as the Eagles went from Minnesota to Ft. Myers to Miami to South Carolina and back home.
- GS played three contests in Savannah this season and won all three. The Eagles defeated Florida A&M (83-72) and Radford (65-64) in the Savannah Invitational and won 94-75 at Savannah State.
- The Eagles picked up the 1,200th win in the history of the program, which began play in 1926-27, when they topped Coastal Georgia 92-43 Nov. 14.
- GS held Coastal Georgia to 23.1 percent shooting from the field, the lowest for an opponent since holding North Georgia to 22.7 percent in 2003.
- Georgia Southern used 11 different combinations of starting lineups last year. GS has used six this season.

### **Talking 1K**

- Sophomore Tookie Brown scored his 1,000th career point at Appalachian State Feb. 13.
- He is the first Eagle in the program's modern era to reach the mark as a sophomore. Two Eagles did it in their second seasons at Georgia Southern (Elton Nesbitt and Johnny Mills).
- Junior Mike Hughes has 969 points, and sophomore Ike Smith has 925.

- Three Eagles reached the mark in the same season once. Nesbitt, Terry Williams and Jean Francois scored their 1,000th point in 2004-05.
- The 2004-05 trio and Jelani Hewitt, Eric Ferguson and Trent Wiedeman in 2014-15 are the only times Georgia Southern had three 1,000-point scorers on the same team (Wiedeman scored 886 points at College of Charleston before transferring to GS).

### **Next Up**

- The Eagles finish out the regular season by traveling to in-state rival Georgia State next Saturday. A point in the Southern vs. State Rivalry Series will be up for grabs.

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.

Georgia Southern Athletics provides up-to-date information on all its sports through its official website, [GSEagles.com](http://GSEagles.com), through social media channels [facebook.com/GSAthletics](https://facebook.com/GSAthletics), [twitter.com/GSAthletics](https://twitter.com/GSAthletics), iOS app Georgia Southern Eagles and Android app Eagles GATA. For tickets to Georgia Southern athletics events, visit [GSEagles.com/tickets](http://GSEagles.com/tickets).

Georgia Southern Athletics provides current information on all its sports through its official website, [GSEagles.com](http://GSEagles.com), which is fully responsive across all mobile devices. Information on Eagle athletics can also be found through social media channels [facebook.com/GSAthletics](https://facebook.com/GSAthletics), [twitter.com/GSAthletics](https://twitter.com/GSAthletics) and [Instagram.com/GSAthletics](https://Instagram.com/GSAthletics). To purchase tickets to Georgia Southern athletics events, visit [GSEagles.com/tickets](http://GSEagles.com/tickets).

In order to expedite entry and provide a safe environment for all patrons and participants, Georgia Southern Athletics has implemented a Clear Bag Policy for all ticketed sporting events, effective Aug. 1, 2017. Fans can find the complete policy as well as an FAQ section at [GSEagles.com/ClearBag](http://GSEagles.com/ClearBag).