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Simonds Leads State Men's Basketball over Southern



The Eagles will be the third seed and earn a bye in SBC Tourney.

ATLANTA – D'Marcus Simonds scored 21 points, including 16 in the second half, and Georgia State shot 58 percent from 3-point range to get past Georgia Southern, 72-67, Saturday afternoon in the GSU Sports Arena.

Southern finishes in a three-way tie with Arkansas State and Texas State for third in the Sun Belt standings. The Eagles topped both teams in their only games of the season to win the tiebreaker and earn the third seed in next week's Sun Belt Tournament in New Orleans.

State jumps ahead of Southern into sole possession of third place in the Sun Belt standings and can move into second if South Alabama defeats Arkansas State this afternoon.

Ike Smith scored 27 points to lead Georgia Southern (18-13, 11-7), and Tookie Brown finished with 11 points, three assists and two steals. Jake Allsmiller and Mike Hughes each scored nine.

Simonds was 5 of 6 from the field and the free-throw line in the second period, and Jeremy Hollowell collected 15 points and 12 rebounds in the game for Georgia State (19-11, 12-6). Jeff Thomas canned all four of his 3-point attempts and netted 16 points.

The story

The Panthers led 70-67 with 18 seconds left after Malik Benlevi made his first of two free throws. He missed the second, but Hollowell came out of a scrum with the loose ball and was fouled. Hollowell made a pair from the line with 13 seconds left to seal the win.

Southern led 57-51 after a 3-pointer from the corner by Devonte Boykins with 8:46 to play. State went on a 9-2 run and took a one-point lead on a Simonds free throw with six minutes to go, and after Brown scored a layup for the Eagles, Simonds nailed a 3-pointer to put State up for good.

Brown hit a free throw to trim the margin to 69-66, and the Eagles got a defensive stop but Brown's 3-point try from the top of the key rimmed out with a minute to play. Southern got the ball back, and Smith cashed in on a free throw with 27 seconds left to make it a two-point game.

State shot 57 percent in the second half and outrebounded the Eagles 45-21 in the contest, using 11 offensive rebounds to score 14 second-chance points. Southern has lost its last seven games at State and has not won there since 1992.

Quotables from head coach Mark Byington

"They shot 57 percent in the second half and we did force a lot of turnovers so we were able to be aggressive, but we just have to have the mentality when we come out in the second half it's the same mentality as in the first half. It has to be five guys out there working together and guarding the ball and rebounding. That's what we were missing, and we had to change up defenses to try to save us and it wasn't enough."

"I thought we were really good tonight on offense. As a coach, you can't get upset when guys are taking open shots but missing open shots because it's the process of taking the right ones and making the right ones. We had some really good looks, and we made a good amount of them. We did a good job of attacking so I liked us offensively, but defense and rebounding was our downfall today."

"It was a great game. Both teams played to win. I have no problem with our effort. We played really hard and they played really hard. Great environment. This is good for basketball, and I think it's going to be good for us. I don't think any team is going to be as battle-tested going into the tournament as what we've gone through. I like where we

are. We have to fix some things and we have to play better but I like what we've been through to get to this point."

Next up

The Eagles head to New Orleans for the Sun Belt Tournament next week as at least the fourth seed but could move into third if Arkansas State loses. Game times and opponents will be announced later today.

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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