

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Athletics News

Athletics

11-7-2017

Season Preview Part 1: Defense and Rebounding the Key for Men's Basketball

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/athletics-news-online>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Season Preview Part 1: Defense and Rebounding the Key for Men's Basketball" (2017). *Athletics News*. 1313.

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/athletics-news-online/1313>

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Athletics at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Athletics News by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Georgia Southern University



Season Preview Part 1: Defense and Rebounding the Key for Men's Basketball

The Eagles open the season at Wake Forest Friday night.

Marc Gignac

Men's Basketball

Posted: 11/7/2017 12:01:00 PM

First installment in a two-part men's basketball season preview.

STATESBORO - They knew it while it was happening, the game film confirmed it and it has been the focus of the Georgia Southern men's basketball program since the conclusion of the 2016-17 campaign. When the Eagles defended and rebounded well, they had success. When they didn't, they struggled.

The Eagles have proven their ability on the offensive end and should have even greater firepower and depth this season, but to take the next step and make a run in the Sun Belt Tournament and maybe even further, they have to demonstrate their toughness, especially on the defensive end. They have to be a team of willing defenders and rebounders.

"I think we just have to embrace a dirty, grind-it-out game that's not going to be free flowing," said head coach [Mark Byington](#). "You have to be able to get stops, and that was the biggest thing for us last year. When we were successful, we were getting stops because our transition game on the other end is really good. We weren't as successful when we were taking the ball out of the net after they scored because we had to play more of a half-court, slowed-down game."

The Eagle team that advanced to the 2015 Sun Belt Championship game understood that, and Byington says that team was not as skilled offensively or as deep as the current squad. They had a knack for making plays at both ends of the floor, especially in tight games.

The Eagles have been one of the youngest teams in the country the last two years, and for the second year in a row, Georgia Southern returns 94 percent of its scoring and all five starters, including first-team All-Sun Belt selections [Ike Smith](#) and [Tookie Brown](#).

GS was picked fourth and Brown, Smith and [Mike Hughes](#) were named all-conference in the Sun Belt Preseason Poll, which is voted on by the league's 12 head coaches. Counting redshirt junior [Shawn O'Connell](#), the Eagles have five seniors on the roster.

"I'm excited about this group, and for the first time in a couple years, we have seniors," said Byington. "This senior class has been through a lot. These guys, as freshmen, were two points away from going to the NCAA Tournament, and I like the fact that they are going to have urgency. I'm hoping that urgency spreads to the younger guys."

Georgia Southern's backcourt has been called one of the best in the Sun Belt by various publications. Brown and Smith get a bulk of the attention because of the numbers they put up in finishing as the top-two scorers in the conference last season.

Smith ranked first in the Sun Belt in scoring (19.6 ppg) and field goals made (230), second in free throws made (127) and fifth in field goal percentage (.498). He finished the campaign just two points shy of reaching the 1,000-point milestone for his career.

"Ike is our hardest worker, and Ike has a maturity, a professionalism about him that you don't see with college athletes," said Byington. "He's extremely dedicated to working hard, and it shows. He's the type of guy who is willing to take the next step not for himself, but for the team, and I think he's extremely team driven even though he had a ton of individual success last year."

A two-time first-team All-Sun Belt selection, Brown tied for second in the Sun Belt in scoring (17.1 ppg) and ranked first in free throws made (148), sixth in steals (1.4/gm) and fourth in assists (4.0/gm). He became the first sophomore in school history to go over 1,000 points for his career.

"I'm really proud of Tookie's growth, and it's hard to say that somebody has grown when he's been first team all-conference in back to back years, but I've always wanted our team to reflect Tookie's drive and his competitiveness," said Byington. "It's starting to get contagious with him giving it to other guys. He's been great for two years, but I told him I'm going to be harder on him than anybody else because he's got something more inside of him, and he wants that. So, I've been really hard on Tookie because I want to see him go to another level, which I know will bring our team to another level."

[Mike Hughes](#) and [Jake Allsmiller](#) are the only two student-athletes on the roster who played in that 2015 Sun Belt Championship game, and both have played in over 90 career contests.

Hughes averaged 10.6 points, 3.9 rebounds, 1.2 steals and 1.6 assists a contest in 30 games. He tallied his 1,000th career point against Utah Valley in the final game of the season.

"Mike won't make excuses, but he wasn't himself last year and he just had a multitude of injuries that slowed him down that he tried to fight through because he wanted the team to win," said Byington. "This is a guy who as a sophomore in the second half of Sun Belt play, I thought he was the best two-way guard in the league. The exciting thing is that he looks like he's moving better, and he's back to his old self. He can make big shots, he can make big plays and I think he's an all-conference performer."

Allsmiller shot 42 percent from long distance and ranked fourth in the Sun Belt in 3-pointers, averaging 2.4 per game. He canned 77 3-pointers and enters the season ranked eighth on the Georgia Southern career list with 182.

"Jake is obviously known as a great shooter and gives us a lot of spacing and things with his offensive play and shooting, but the thing that's been impressive about Jake is that he's changed his body now," said Byington. "He's been dedicated to his body to where now he's able to have more physicality. He's been much tougher on defense and competing for rebounds than he's ever been. I think Jake will be much more than a one dimensional guy this year, and I think he's going to be a really good basketball player."

Georgia Southern expects to be deeper at the guard position with some faces that will be relatively new to Eagle fans. Sophomore [Jared Hamilton](#) is eligible to play this season after transferring in last year, and [Quan Jackson](#) redshirted the 2016-17 campaign. Junior college transfer [David-Lee Jones Jr.](#) signed in the spring and is eligible this year as a sophomore.

Hamilton averaged nine points, 4.9 rebounds and 1.4 assists in 29.5 minutes a game as a freshman at Jacksonville State, and he scored 13 points in each of the Eagles' two exhibition games.

"As athletic as we are, Jared might be the most athletic guy on our team," said Byington. "He has a chance to play multiple positions and be versatile. He can handle the ball, he can drive it, he's gotten much better at his shooting, and he's got a chance to be an elite defensive player. He can play multiple positions on offense, and I think he can guard multiple positions on defense so he should make a huge impact."

Jackson averaged 18 points, 6.3 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 3.8 steals a game in his senior season at Godby High School in Tallahassee and helped lead Godby to a state championship as a junior in 2015.

"[Quan Jackson](#) has really improved, and he's put on 17 pounds since last year," said Byington. "There are many days in practice where he is one of our top players. He's one of our best defensive players, he can make shots, he can dribble, he can do a lot of different things and he's going to be able to help the team this year because he's grown up. He's much more mature and he understands what it takes to play at a high level of Division I basketball."

Jones Jr. averaged 14.7 points, 5.5 assists, 4.1 rebounds and 1.6 steals a game at Santa Fe College last season and led the Saints to an 18-11 record.

"David-Lee can play the point guard and the shooting guard spot so he'll back Tookie up, but he's going to play along with Tookie as well," said Byington. "He doesn't even know how good he is yet, and I think that's kind of the positive and the negative that he'll make some plays in practice that are just high level plays, but he doesn't know sometimes why he's doing it or how he's doing it - he's just reacting. As he starts seeing the game better and understanding how much talent he has and how good he can be, we are going to have a special player."

Check GSEagles.com tomorrow for the second installment of the season preview.

Georgia Southern Athletics provides current information on all its sports through its official website, 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](#), [twitter.com/GSAthletics](#) and [Instagram.com/GSAthletics](#). To purchase tickets to Georgia Southern athletics events, visit [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](#).

Copyright ©2018 Georgia Southern University