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# Georgia Southern University



## SEASON PREVIEW: GS Women's Basketball Looks To Continue Upward Trend In 2017-18

Eagles will have a younger look, but anticipating several returners to take advantage of the opportunity to step up Women's Basketball

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STATESBORO, Ga. - The Georgia Southern women's basketball team heads into the 2017-18 with quite a bit of momentum, as Head Coach [Kip Drown](#)'s teams have improved tremendously overall and in Sun Belt Conference play in his first two seasons in Statesboro.

Momentum and balance are the key phrases for Coach Drown this year as he expects a team that is, in some ways, younger than teams he has coached in the past to have many different contributors offensively and defensively, really improve as the season goes on and surprise folks at the end of the season.

"I think we're a more balanced basketball team than last year," Coach Drown said. "Across the board. I do think we will continue to grow and get better as we go through this process. My concern is that we want to get off to a good start, and get that confidence that we can use to move us forward."

"This group is very competitive," Drown said. "I like that about them. We get after each other in practice, particularly when it's scrimmage-type stuff. We may not be the best breakdown group sometimes, but once we start going 5-on-5, competing with each other, it picks up. I'm really hopeful that will transfer over to how we play this season."

An old basketball adage is that everything starts with the point guard, and the Eagles have good depth at the position, starting with redshirt junior [Jakayvea Akins](#) and sophomore [Amira Atwater](#), who have a good battle brewing at the point to start the 2017-18 season.

"We've got two really competing for each other," Coach Drown said. "The job is open. We're gonna start Jakayvea, but [Amira Atwater](#) is a young sophomore who is getting better and better. Right now, they're going to split that position at this point in time. We'll see what happens as we continue forward. They're going to have some growing pains, but they're both different players than they were last year at this time."

Two other Eagles will see time at the point as junior [Rhein Beamon](#) and senior [Trellanie English-Lurry](#) will move over from other positions to spell both Akins and Atwater.

"Though more of a 2-guard, Trell has played some point," Coach Drown said. "And I'm one who likes four point guards, so we've moved [Rhein Beamon](#) to play some point and she's exceeded all of our expectations."

As evidenced by last season's school-record three-point output, the Eagles have plenty of shooters on the wing. Sophomore [Alexis Brown](#) led the Sun Belt in three-point percentage as a freshman, while English-Lurry and Beamon will also see a good amount of action. Sophomore [Nakol Franks](#) hit 26 threes last season and freshman Tatum Barber has come in to the program with a lot of accolades. Senior [Alexis Foulks](#), normally a post, will also see time out on the wing.

"We have a nice mix there," Coach Drown said. "Rhein is a slasher who has worked on her pull-up jumper, and she is going to start at the 3. We've got a lot of kids that can shoot it, [Alexis Brown](#) led the conference in three-point shooting last year, Nakol is a great three-point shooter and Trell is shooting the ball really well right now. Tatum Barber, a freshman who can really shoot the basketball, is going through some freshman growth. We'll play Jakayvea at the 2 as well, to get her on the floor with Amira. [Alexis Foulks](#) is a swing who can go 3/4 for us, she can play some 3."

"We've got some kids who can really shoot it from the perimeter," Coach Drown said. "And then we've got some kids who have the athleticism in the Sun Belt to be able to attack and put the ball on the floor and get to the rim. I keep going back to that word, balance, but it fits this group."

The post positions start at the four, where Foulks will be the starter to begin the season. Sophomores Haley Dias-Allen and [Victoria Stavropoulos](#) will each play roles at the spot, and the Eagles will also look to get freshman Aliyah Belcher involved.

"We're going to start [Alexis Foulks](#) at the four," Coach Drown said. "She can shoot it, and she improved her conditioning and her strength this summer. We need some rebounding from that spot. Haley Dias-Allen, I think, is going to be a really great player in the Sun Belt. You can tell she's maturing. She's going to play a lot of minutes. Aliyah Belcher is a freshman we really like a lot, a physical kid who can go out and shoot it. Victoria has gotten better, she's worked hard on her ball handling, she'll be in that mix."

The five will begin with senior [Sierra Butler](#), who moves from the four to try and become that fixture in the post to provide not only defense and rebounding, but scoring. She'll be backed up by Dias-Allen, as well as incoming freshman Sarah Moore. Fellow incoming freshman Alisha Owens will miss time early but hopes to get back into team activities this Spring.

"Probably the biggest move we made in the offseason has been moving [Sierra Butler](#) from the 4 to the 5," Coach Drown said. "In our system, that's a huge difference. We talked to her about it in the spring, since she started at the 4 for two years for us. We wanted her to be on board with it. At first she was a little hesitant, but it puts her closer to the rim. She is a beast rebounding the basketball and she should be able to score in there as she has really improved her shooting."

"Haley will backup at both the 4 and the 5, and between those two spots should get 20-25 minutes a night. Sarah Moore, a freshman we brought in, is like a young colt still finding her legs, so to speak. She's got a lot of Sun Belt athleticism and has a chance to be a really good player. Alisha was one of the top final 16 players in the state of Kentucky for Miss Basketball."

The schedule for the Eagles in 2017-18 is an attractive one, with several postseason schools on the non-conference slate in both home and away matchups. Coach Drown is excited to see how his student-athletes will stack up against tough competition early in the year.

"Alabama brings all 5 starters back from winning two games in the WNIT," Coach Drown said. "Central Florida and Mercer will be big road trips for us, and IUPUI is a team most people don't know about, but they can really shoot it. Those are four and five good basketball teams who made postseason play. With the other people on the schedule, I think it's a schedule that will make us better, but it will also let us be competitive. We are going to try and come out of the non-conference schedule at 6-5 or better. Going into conference, that would be really good for us."

And the Sun Belt Conference schedule will be a challenging one again, with UT Arlington picked in a pre-season poll of the league's coaches to capture the title in 2017-18. Little Rock, Troy, Louisiana and Texas State round out the top five teams in the league's poll, and Georgia Southern was picked to finish 10th in the 12-team league.

Coach Drown believes that many in the Sun Belt are overlooking the Eagles because of what they lost last season, but he knows his team has the opportunity, with some early season successes, to build that confidence that fans saw in last season's second-half run.

"I think we're going to surprise people," Drown said. "We are a lot better basketball team than the Sun Belt thinks. We've got a lot of kids getting better at stuff. We've hardly touched the tip of the iceberg on growth either, we'll be a lot better. My teams have historically done that. Start slow, gather momentum. Last year, our play in the Sun Belt was perfect example of that. We got better and better as we went through, and this team should do that."

"I can see it already developing, in our practices and playing," Coach Drown said. "I can see them starting to expand what they're doing, gaining confidence. I think this is a new thing for this group. Those kids who have played secondary roles, to see them step up and really do it, it's going to happen, I believe that. Of course, I hope it happens sooner rather than later. But so far it's been a fun group to coach. These young women are very coachable, always working on things to get better at."

The Eagles will open up the 2017-18 season on Friday, November 10th, traveling to North Carolina A&T for a 5:30 p.m. matchup with the Bulldogs. [Follow the season opener via live stats from NC A&T.](#)