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CONWAY, S.C. - The second-seeded Georgia State men's soccer team eliminated third-seeded Georgia Southern, 3-1, from the 2017 Sun Belt Conference Championship semifinals on Saturday morning at the Coastal Carolina Soccer Stadium in Conway, S.C.

The Panthers (12-6-1) advance to the championship match on Sunday against the winner of Saturday afternoon's other semifinal between top-seeded and host Coastal Carolina and fifth-seeded Howard. The Eagles finish the 2017 season with a 9-8-1 overall record, the program's first winning record since 2006, and Georgia Southern earned its first regional ranking from the United Soccer Coaches since the 2008 season.

After surviving the first-round matchup just yesterday against Appalachian State in penalty kicks, a tight defensive battle was expected between the Panthers and the Eagles. The first shot of the match came in the 11th minute as Robert Flott turned aside a shot by Georgia State's Hannes Burmeister, and Georgia Southern did not have its first shot until the 21st minute when Rasmus Juul's shot off of a corner kick was saved by Panther goalkeeper Yannic Horn.
In the 33rd minute, Georgia State had the breakthrough as Salomon Lorenzano broke down the left side, dribbled into the box and made a short cross to the right. The cross was deflected but found Frank Rosenwald in front of an open net for the easy tap-in and the 1-0 lead.

There would not be another shot before halftime as the Panthers took the one-goal lead into the break. Shots were even 3-3 between the two teams.

The key sequence in the second half came in the 54th minute. An apparent handball in the box by the Panthers went uncalled, and Georgia State quickly countered. Max Hemming's shot from the top of the box was blocked by Flott, but rolled back and into the goal for the two-goal advantage.

With the Eagles chasing in the final third of the match, Georgia Southern pulled one back in the 68th minute as Blake Wilson headed in a corner kick from Javier Carbonell to make the score 2-1. The goal was the seventh of the season for the senior, and Carbonell added to his Sun Belt-leading assist total with his ninth.

Georgia State would reclaim the two-goal advantage 10 minutes later, as Liam Fitzsimmons' slotted cross to the far post would be finished by Lukas Joyner, making the score 3-1 in the 78th minute.

"It's very difficult to lose under these circumstances," Head Coach John Murphy said. "I thought we put ourselves in a great position to win the game. It turned on a moment that didn't go our way, and unfortunately, you have to deal with those situations. It changed the game, and it's disappointing for the kids. I thought we were very much in the game at that point, with the way we were creating chances."

The Eagles finished the match with an 11-6 edge in shots, as well as a 7-5 edge in shots on goal. Robert Flott made a pair of saves in net for Georgia Southern, while two keepers - Horn and Luke Oesterle - had three saves apiece for Georgia State. The Eagles had a 7-3 edge in corner kicks and were whistled for 16 fouls, compared to eight for the Panthers. Georgia State was offsides four times and Georgia Southern once.

The result also gives Georgia State two points in the Southern vs. State rivalry series, one point for the win and one bonus point for a postseason win. You can view the rivalry series results here.

Georgia Southern loses six players from this season's squad - Wilson, Flott, Nick Wells, Adam Abdellaoui, Thor Sveinbjornsson and Chase Herzog - but returns eight starters and 24 players overall for 2018.

"I think we took a step forward as a program," Coach Murphy said. "We were very competitive against a difficult schedule, and that bodes well for the future. My thoughts are with our senior class and the efforts they put out on our behalf. I'm grateful to all of them, and all of those guys who were available for selection were on the pitch at the end of the game today, as our way of thanking them for all they've done."