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# Men's Basketball Preview: Eagles Open Four-Game Homestand Thursday

*Tipoff is set for 7:30 p.m. in Hanner Fieldhouse.*

Marc Gignac



The Eagles open a four-game homestand.

Men's Basketball | 1/6/2016 1:55:00 PM

**Georgia Southern (4-8, 0-2) vs. South Alabama (5-8, 0-2)**

**Thursday, Jan. 7 - Hanner Fieldhouse (4,325) – 7:30 p.m.**

[Live Video](#) | [Live Stats](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Season Promotions](#) | [Gameday Guide: Basketball](#)

**Radio:** 103.7 WBMZ-FM (Statesboro/Metter/Swainsboro), 102.1 WZAT-FM (Savannah), 1370 WLOP-AM (Jesup)

**Promotions:** Youth League Night - Group rate of \$5 is available to Youth Basketball Leagues; Submit your favorite tunes for [Throwback Thursday](#)

**Series:** GS Trails 6-3, W 2

**Last meeting:** 2/21/15, W 80-73 (Hanner)

### **Probable Starters:**

#2 [Mike Hughes](#)

#3 [Ike Smith](#)

#4 [Tookie Brown](#)

#5 [Devince Boykins](#)

#14 [Coye Simmons](#)

### **Layup Line**

- Georgia Southern opens a four-game homestand by playing host to South Alabama Thursday.
- It's the first of two meetings against the Jaguars this season.
- Georgia Southern is 1-4 in its last five and coming off a 92-72 setback at UT Arlington Saturday.
- Freshman [Tookie Brown](#) was named the Sun Belt Player of the Week by College Sports Madness Dec. 28. He averaged 24 points, 4.3 assists, three rebounds and two steals in three games from Dec. 15-22. Brown shot 51 percent from field and 56 percent from 3-point range.
- Brown is ranked in the top-10 in the Sun Belt in scoring (7th, 17.0 ppg), assists (6th, 3.6 apg), free-throw percentage (10th, .808), steals (2nd, 2.2), 3-point percentage (3rd, .438) and assist/turnover ratio (6th, 1.7).
- Brown has scored 20-plus points in four games, including three of the last five. He is averaging 19 points in the last nine contests.
- Georgia Southern is 23-9 under head coach [Mark Byington](#) in Hanner Fieldhouse and posted a 13-2 record in the building last season. The Eagles are 3-1 this season.
- With 11-of-12 scholarship student-athletes who are freshmen, redshirt freshmen or sophomores (92 percent), Georgia Southern has the highest percentage of underclassmen on its current roster of the 345 NCAA Division I squads. Liberty (91 percent), Ohio State (85 percent), Fairleigh Dickinson (85 percent) and Wyoming (80 percent) round out the top-5.
- Georgia Southern lost 76 percent of its scoring and 72 percent of its rebounding from last season.
- The Eagles were picked 10th in the Preseason Sun Belt Conference Coaches Poll.
- South Alabama is 2-3 in its last five and dropped its two Sun Belt contests last week at home. The Jaguars are coming off of an 89-67 loss to Arkansas State Saturday.
- South Alabama was picked seventh in the Sun Belt Preseason Coaches Poll, and Ken Williams was named preseason first-team all-conference.
- Williams leads the team with 14 points a game, and Georgi Boyanov averages 9.6 points and 7.6 rebounds a contest.

## The Series

- South Alabama leads the all-time series, which began in 1978, 6-3, but Georgia Southern swept the Jaguars last season.
- Prior to last season, the teams had not met since 2010 and 2011, both South Alabama victories.
- Last Meeting and last meeting in Hanner (2/21/15):
- Jelani Hewitt scored a game-high 22 points, and Georgia Southern shot 61 percent in the second half to push past South Alabama 80-74.
- Hewitt added three assists, four rebounds and three steals for the Eagles and was one of five Georgia Southern players in double figures in the scoring column. Mike Hughes finished with 13 points and seven rebounds, and Curtis Diamond tallied 11 points and six boards. Angel Matias and Trent Wiedeman each scored 11.
- Ken Williams led South Alabama with 18 points to go along with six rebounds, and Abdul Lewis posted 17 points and 13 rebounds. Taishaun Johnson netted 14 points, while Dionte Ferguson and John Brown each scored 10.
- The Eagles trailed by as many as eight points in the second half and down 56-55, used a 10-0 run to take control of the game.
- Matias started it with a conventional 3-point play, and Hewitt drilled a 3-pointer from the wing on a fast break after a nifty cross-court pass from Hughes. Wiedeman nailed a turnaround jumper in the lane, and Diamond capped the stretch with a jumper, giving the Eagles a 67-58 cushion with 4:22 to go.
- The teams traded baskets the next two trips down the floor and then went without a basket for the next two minutes of game time. Williams trimmed the margin to 69-63 with a layup with just over a minute left and the Jaguars got a defensive stop but Matias got a steal for the Eagles and went the length of the court for a layup and a 71-63 lead with 1:03 to play.
- Ferguson converted a conventional 3-point play for South Alabama with 43.2 on the clock to make it a 5-point game, but the Eagles made eight straight free throws and went 9-for-10 in the last minute to seal the win.

## Quick Hitters

- The Eagles are led in scoring by a pair of freshmen in Tookie Brown and Ike Smith. The last time a freshman led Georgia Southern in scoring was the 1999-2000 season, when the school's all-time scoring leader Julius Jenkins led the Eagles with 15.5 points a game. Elton Nesbitt averaged 15.7 points a game to lead the Eagles in scoring as a newcomer to the program in 2003-04, but it was his sophomore season after spending a year at Compton Community College.
- Ike Smith is one of two freshman in the league ranked in the top-20 in both points (11.6) and rebounds (4.9).
- Sophomore Mike Hughes has started 42 of 43 games in his career.
- Hughes' six steals vs. Stetson Dec. 22, were a career high and two shy of the school record. He leads the Sun Belt in steals with 2.3 a game.
- The Eagles are averaging 79.8 points a game this season and have scored 80-plus points in five games. Georgia Southern scored 80-plus points in just six contests last year.

- Eleven different Eagles have scored 10 or more points in a game this season.
- [Devonte Boykins](#) has been named one of 154 nominees for the NABC Allstate Insurance Good Works Team.
- Georgia Southern is 16-3 in Hanner Fieldhouse in its last 19 contests there.
- Georgia Southern posted a 4-6 record in the non-conference portion of its schedule.
- The Eagles played their Sun Belt opener on the road for the second straight season. Georgia Southern is 0-2 in Sun Belt openers.
- Georgia Southern played its first ranked opponent since 2008 when the Eagles traveled to No. 7/6 Duke Dec. 15. Their last game against a ranked opponent was also at Duke Nov. 11, 2008.
- Georgia Southern's 21 steals against Bob Jones (11/30) was one shy of the school record set against Little Rock in 1981 and tied against The Citadel in 2004.
- After not playing an SEC opponent since a 78-75 loss to Auburn Dec. 30, 2011, the Eagles have faced two this season. Georgia Southern fell 82-72 at Ole Miss Nov. 16 and 92-62 at Auburn Nov. 20.
- Georgia Southern's 116 points in a 116-49 season-opening win over Webber International Nov. 13 were tied for the 16th most all-time and the most since a 116-73 neutral site win over UC Davis Nov. 12, 2006, which was the 2006-07 season opener.
- The Eagles' 40 3-point attempts tied for the second-most in school history (West Georgia, 1/2/1992).

### **Boarding the Mothership**

- Thirteen Georgia Southern games will be broadcast on the ESPN family of Networks this season.
- Games at Duke (12/15) and vs. Georgia State at home (2/23) will air on ESPN2.
- Eight Sun Belt contests will be broadcast live on ESPN3, and the Eagles' game at USC Upstate Nov. 27 was shown on ESPN3.
- The matchups at Ole Miss and Auburn were shown on the SEC Network +.

### **Inside Georgia Southern Basketball is Back**

- Inside Georgia Southern Basketball, presented by Gnat's Landing, will make its 2016 debut Monday, Jan. 4., from 7-8 p.m. live from Gnat's Landing at 470 South Main Street, just across from Beautiful Eagle Creek in Statesboro.
- Men's basketball coach [Mark Byington](#) and women's basketball coach [Kip Drown](#) will sit down with the Voice of the Eagles, [Danny Reed](#), each week throughout the remainder of the season to review the recent games and talk about upcoming contests.
- Fans can enjoy the show live from Gnat's stage, listen on the radio via affiliates (103.7 WBMZ-FM Statesboro, 102.1 WZAT-FM Savannah, 1370 WLOP-AM Jesup) or online for free at GSEagles.com. Fans can also interact live during the show by tweeting their questions to @GASouthernRadio or by joining the audience in the restaurant.