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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Spring '16 - Defensive and Special Teams Breakdown" (2016). *Athletics News*. 1682.

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Spring '16 - Defensive and Special Teams Breakdown

A look at each of the defensive and special teams position groups heading into spring practice



Football | 3/23/2016 12:00:00 PM

Story Links

STATESBORO - The Georgia Southern Eagles will hit the field Thursday for the first of 15 spring practices under new head coach [Tyson Summers](#). With the session upon us, GSEagles.com caught up with the head Eagle to get his breakdown of each position group. Yesterday, we previewed the offense, today will be the defense/special teams and tomorrow we'll have a Q&A with Summers.

Defensive Ends

Who's back? The Eagles return a solid group of players who saw a ton of action last season in senior [Bernard Dawson](#) (28 total tackles, 6.0 tackles for loss and 4.0 sacks; All-Sun Belt second

team), senior Jamal Johnson (39 tackles, 6.5 tackles for loss, 3.0 sacks), sophomore Logan Hunt (8 starts, 30 tackles), senior Nardo Govan (8 tackles, GoDaddy Bowl Defensive MVP), Tre Griffin (6 tackles) and Ryan George (18 total tackles, 3.5 sacks).

Who's Gone? Lennie Richardson was the only senior defensive end on last year's team and he missed a majority of the season with an injury.

Fresh Faces: J.B Kouassi redshirted last season and Tim Wilkerson II sat out per NCAA rules after transferring from Eastern Illinois.

What to expect: The Eagles have a ton of depth at this spot, but this group still must adjust to a new coaching staff and scheme. While Dawson and Hunt head into spring as the No. 1s, expect a heated battle as everyone jockey for position.

Defensive Tackles

Who's back? The defensive tackle spot also returns everyone from last year, including two-year starter Jay Ellison, who earned second-team All-Sun Belt honors a year ago. Darrius Sapp started 11 games a year ago, tallying 23 tackles, including 1.5 tackles for loss. Also back are Zack Copeland (5 tackles) and Ian Bush (3 tackles).

Who's Gone? No one!

Fresh Faces: Shelby Townsend, Jr. redshirted after transferring from Miles College, as did Chris Washington, who came in from West Georgia. Darius Roper is a redshirt junior who enrolled in January after playing two seasons at ASA in New York. He originally signed with Duquesne out of high school and redshirted there his freshman year.

What to expect: The Eagles have three big bodies in Ellison, Copeland and Sapp who saw extensive action last year and look to be ahead of the pack. But with a new scheme and young players looking to get on the field, spring is important for the entire group and no one can rest on their laurels.

Linebackers

Who's back? The Eagles return two starters in Ironhead Gallon and Chris DeLaRosa. Gallon started 12 games last year and recorded 81 tackles while DeLaRosa had 43 stops. William Bussey, Jacorey Belvin, Kurt Oehlbeck and Ken Butler, Jr. are all back and looking to move up the depth chart.

Who's Gone? The Eagles lost a great one in linebacker Antwione Williams, who led the team with 107 stops.

Fresh Faces: All eyes this spring will be on Florida State transfer Ukeme Eligwe, who had to sit out last year per NCAA rules. He starred on the scout team a year ago, but transferring that to the varsity squad will be the key. He brings great size at 6-2, 239 and looks to be in the same

physical mode of Williams (6-3, 245). Alvin Ward, Jr., a mid-year enrollee, walk-on Brandon Holley and Ross Alexander, who moved from defensive end, are also new to the linebacking corps. Alexander saw significant action last year and even had an interception against The Citadel.

What to expect: While the departure of Williams stings, the staff is high on Eligwe and what he brings to the table. Gallon has been a leader in the offseason and is expected to do big things in his senior year. Building depth and learning the new schemes will be the top priorities this spring.

Cornerbacks

Who's back? Darius Jones, Jr., is the lone player returning who saw significant playing time on defense last year. He earned nine starts on the year, mostly at the nickel position, and totaled 32 tackles, 2.0 tackles for loss and had two interceptions. Also back are DeAndre Watkins, Rayquan Sam, Jacob Schofill and R.J. Murray, who all saw limited action last year.

Who's Gone? Georgia Southern's top corners from last year, Darrius White, Caleb Williams, Cliff Saggus and Riyahd Jones, are all gone. White and Williams combined for 57 tackles and five interceptions last year alone.

Fresh Faces: The coaches are excited about Christian Matthew and Jessie Liptrot, both of whom redshirted last year.

What to expect: Jones, Jr. should be one of the corners while a freshman could be battling for the other spot. A tough spring is expected to bring out the best in this group to see who rises to the top.

Safeties

Who's back? Robert Brice II and Joshua Moon both saw the field early on before missing the back half of the season for various reasons. Both are back and ready to battle for the free safety spot. At strong safety, Zander Yost will look to make the most of his senior season.

Who's Gone? Another area hit by graduation, the Eagles lost free safety Matt Dobson and strong safety Antonio Glover.

Fresh Faces: Senior Vegas Harley, who dabbled at cornerback last year while also playing quarterback, makes the move to strong safety and looks to grab the starting spot in his final year. Strong safeties Jay Bowdry and Brennan FitzPatrick, and free safety Lane Ecton all redshirted last season.

What to expect: These two spots are wide open as no one on the roster has started a game. The entire secondary will be watched closely by the new staff with battles expected to carry over to fall practice.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Place-kicker

Who's back? [Younghoe Koo](#) ended up handling the kickoffs, PATs and field goals in the second half of the season. The strong-legged senior is expected to once again be the guy, but needs a good spring to solidify his position.

Who's Gone? [Alex Hanks](#), who started the season as the place-kicker, graduated.

Fresh Faces: [Tyler Bass](#) dressed for every home game last year, but redshirted, will challenge for playing time.

What to expect: Koo is the clear front-runner for the position, but has to keep kicking the way he did toward the end of last season.

Punters

Who's back? [Matt Flynn](#) is the only punter on the roster this spring.

Who's Gone? [Ryan Nowicki](#) averaged 41.1 yards on 33 punts last season.

Fresh Faces: None.

What to expect: Flynn will have his chance to show the coaches what he's made of this spring. Last year, he kicked just eight times, averaging 41.0 yards per punt with a long of 55 yards.

Long Snappers

Who's back? [Jake Abraham](#) has snapped just four times over the past two seasons, but is anxious to step up in his senior season. [Nick Sewak](#) has been in the program a few years, but has yet to see the field. He should provide good competition for the starting gig.

Who's Gone? [Jake Banta](#) handled both the PATs and field goals the past three seasons.

Fresh Faces: [Travis Baugus](#) redshirted last season.

What to expect: A wide-open spot, the long snapping job may not be won until fall practice rolls around.

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