

3-29-2016

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Georgia Southern University

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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Women's Basketball 2015-16 Season in Review" (2016). *Athletics News*. 1648.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/athletics-news-online/1648>

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Women's Basketball 2015-16 Season in Review

Eagle women make positive strides under first-year head coach Kip Drown



Women's Basketball | 3/29/2016 11:13:00 AM

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STATESBORO, Ga. – In a time where near instantaneous gratification is part of everyday life, sometimes people forget that it takes time for things to develop, especially after a change is made. That is not something that head coach [Kip Drown](#) needs to be reminded of as he works to raise the Georgia Southern women's basketball team back up into a contender in the Sun Belt Conference, the region and NCAA Division I women's basketball.

The rebuilding process that Coach Drown began during the 2015-16 season may not have generated the types of results that he and the Eagles wanted right away, but progress could be seen throughout the season, especially to the head coaching veteran who has made a career of turning programs around for the better. Drown inherited a program that had struggled over the previous five seasons prior to his arrival in April of 2015. Before Drown arrived, the Eagles were 43-108 (.285) over that five-year stretch and were struggling to make the transition from the SoCon – where they won three regular season titles and a tournament crown – to the much more difficult Sun Belt Conference.

"I feel like our team got much better as an entire unit this season, but we're not where we want to be by any means," Drown said. "Our record of 7-22 is not what we consider acceptable, but I do feel like we made progress and we are moving in the right direction. It was a difficult year in that we had so many games where we were in it to the end, but were not able to finish.

"At the same time I applaud our players for the resilience they had. No matter what happened, they would keep coming back and working on getting better. Besides three games where I didn't feel like we competed real well, I feel like we went out and competed hard and got better every day. The results weren't what we wanted, but if we continue to go through the process and work hard, the results will follow."

The Eagles started the year off a little shaky against a tough schedule that included road games at Mercer and Georgia and had the Eagles going up against three teams that played in the post season a year ago. But then came a string of three wins over Savannah State, Jacksonville State and Charleston Southern.

"The overtime win at home over Jacksonville State was really big for me and the team," stated Drown. "A lot of times in coaching, winning can be more of a relief that you didn't lose rather than excited for having won and that night it was pure elation from that win. To see the players and the happiness that they had following that game, it was really a memorable moment not just for this year, but for my career."

After completing their out-of-conference schedule in December with a record of 3-6, the Eagles started off their second season in the Sun Belt with a road trip to Texas and returned home for a win over South Alabama. That kicked off four-straight home games before GS went on the road for wins at longtime rivals Georgia State and Appalachian State. Down the stretch and into the second portion of the conference slate, the team struggled to put together wins, but strides were made as the Eagles found themselves in games to the very end, despite the final results.

Georgia Southern twice matched up well against league champion Arkansas State for the early going and then took Little Rock, the conference's second-place team, down to the wire in Statesboro.

While the Eagles went 1-1 in overtime games and dropped five contests by five or less

points, Drown and his team find themselves on an upward trajectory heading into next season.

"The number one thing we have to get better at is we have to shoot the basketball better and score more points," Drown said. "We were last in the conference in scoring and shooting percentage and we just have to get better at scoring and making shots. Our players need to be on the floor this spring and summer getting up thousands and thousands of shots. I also feel like our conditioning has to get better as does our ball handling and offensive movement away from the ball and into a shot.

Drown continued, "To me, no matter the level, basketball is basketball. The Xs and Os are all the same. Some of the skill type things may be better, but it's still execution and you still have to do the little things correctly. I now know the Sun Belt better and I now have a better understanding for how we are going to recruit moving forward."

The Eagles do lose two strong senior post players in [Briana Jones](#) and [Sierra Kirkland](#). Between the two, they played in 207 games. They each depart Georgia Southern with their names in the record books, but more importantly, they depart having helped lay the foundation for what is sure to be a strong program in the years to come.

"With Briana and Sierra, you're dealing with high character people and you can never go wrong with good character. When you have those types of people in your program, then you know the effort, the loyalty and the leadership will be there. All of those traits that you want in the leaders on your team are there in players like them. Right from the start they helped me to learn about this team and helped me to address some areas that we needed to work on. Their leadership and input right from the very start made my job easier and helped me know what we needed to work on as a team not necessarily on the floor but off the floor."

Looking ahead to the 2016-17 season, the Eagles should see even more improvement and part of that will be because the Eagles stand to return all but two players from this year's active squad while adding versatile guard [Jakayvea Akins](#) – who was redshirted during the 2015-16 season – back into the fold along with a host of incoming freshmen. They return all five of their regular starting rotation, including their three best scorers in rising seniors [Angel McGowan](#), [Patrice Butler](#) and [Alexis Sams](#).

With another year under their belts, Drown and company will also count on rising juniors [Alexis Foulks](#), [Trellanie English-Lurry](#) and [Sierra Butler](#) to contribute more and continue to make strides in the off-season. But they will be pushed by incoming freshmen and the underclassmen.

"You can't manufacture or replace experience," stated Drown. "Either players have played and experienced things on the floor or they haven't. That's why when you look at the NCAA tournaments, you see a lot of these mid-majors and smaller teams supposedly upsetting the Power 5 and bigger programs. One of the reasons that happens is because they are keeping their players in the program for three or four years

and they get to be seniors and have experienced a lot of different things and played a lot of basketball together. You cannot replace that experience, but at the same time one of the last things I want is for our players to come in with a sense of entitlement or contentment. Just because they played a role last year does not mean they will play that same role next year and that kind of attitude does not lead players or a team to get better. It should be a little easier for returners because they've been in the system and know what we expect now, but we're bringing in some very good players and we expect them to push for playing time and we expect some of the younger players who didn't play as much this season to come back ready to push those ahead of them."

SEASON STORY LINES

- Coach Drown's first win at Georgia Southern came on Wednesday, Dec. 2 in a 64-48 road win at Savannah State.
- The Eagles defeated long-time rivals Georgia State and Appalachian State back-to-back on the road on Tuesday, Jan. 19 and Monday, Jan. 25.
- Junior guard [Angel McGowan](#) was named to the Sun Belt All-Conference Second Team after averaging 14.7 points, 2.1 steals and 2.0 3-pointers per game.
- McGowan scored her 1,000th career point in the season finale at UL Lafayette. She is the 22nd Eagle to accomplish the feat and has led the Eagles in scoring the past two seasons.
- McGowan enters her senior year already 14th in program history with 150 career steals.
- Senior [Briana Jones](#) wrapped up her career in Statesboro with 80 career blocks, good enough for third all-time in program history. This past season, she swatted away 16 shots.
- Senior [Sierra Kirkland](#) finished her four-year career at GS having played 120 career games, tied for second-most by an Eagle in program history. She also ended her career 17th in career rebounds with 547 and blocked shots with 35.
- Junior [Patrice Butler](#) was named to the all-tournament team at the Stetson Classic. She ended the season on a streak of nine straight games where she scored in double-figures.
- Butler eclipsed the 800 point total for her entire collegiate career on Feb. 25 against Appalachian State when she scored 17 points against the Mountaineers. At GS, Butler currently has 695 points.
- Junior [Alexis Sams](#) finished the averaging 36.0 minutes per game. The mark had her second in the conference this season, but is good enough for first all-time in GS program history for most minutes averaged in a single season.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT FROM COACH DROWN

"I really appreciate the support we have gotten from our boosters and our fans this season. I can't count the number of people who have come up to me and been very encouraging. That means a lot to a coach, especially a new coach, when you have fans who understand what we're trying to do and are very supportive of our program. At the same time, we're not satisfied with our performance for those fans and we are doing

everything in our power to get better so we can bring home a Sun Belt Conference championship. We're going to continue to work hard because this is too good of a situation not to be successful. Southern is a great place to be with great administration, history and support and the city around us in Statesboro is a great, supporting place to be. There are too many positives for us not to get it done and we are excited for next season and more to come."

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