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SBAL Preview: Eagles Host South Alabama in Weekend Sun Belt Series

GS and USA will play a 3 p.m. doubleheader Saturday, 1 p.m. single game Sunday



Frank Fortune

Softball | 4/15/2016 11:36:00 AM

Story Links

[**GAME NOTES \(PDF\)**](#)

PINK GAME SUNDAY

Sunday's game between the Eagles and the Jaguars of South Alabama will serve as Georgia Southern's annual Pink Game with fans being encouraged to wear pink to the game for cancer awareness. Special pink t-shirts will be available for purchase with

those funds going to cancer research and donations will also be accepted to go towards cancer research as well.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The Eagles will close out their seven-game homestand this weekend with three games against current Sun Belt Conference No. 2 South Alabama. The Eagles kicked off the stretch of seven games at home last weekend with a sweep over longtime rival Appalachian State and extended the streak to four games in a row when they bested Kennesaw State Wednesday evening. This weekend's three-game series begins with a 3 p.m. doubleheader on Saturday, Apr. 16 and will finish with a single game at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Apr. 17. So far this season, the Eagles are 11-2 at home.

FACILITY INFO

This weekend's three-game, Sun Belt Conference series against South Alabama will take place at Eagle Field in Statesboro, Ga. The address is 615 Fair Rd, Statesboro, GA 30458. Admission is free.

Live stats ([Game-1](#), [Game-2](#), [Game-3](#)) will be available through Georgia Southern and live video of the game will also be available via [GS All-Access](#).

SCOUTING SOUTH ALABAMA

South Alabama (24-11, 12-2 SBC) enters this weekend's series in Statesboro as the second team in the Sun Belt Conference behind national No. 5 Louisiana-Lafayette but just ahead of the Eagles in third. The Jaguars will put a six-game winning streak on the line and also boast a 12-game conference streak having swept their last three series over Appalachian State, Georgia State and UT Arlington after dropping two games to the Ragin' Cajuns. The Jaguars and Eagles have met just three times prior to this weekend and those games came last season in Mobile in the Eagles' inaugural season in the Sun Belt. USA claimed the series 3-0.

On offense, the Jaguars are batting .302 as a team, good enough for third-best in the conference. They are led by two players batting over .400 for the year in Emily Messer and Kaleigh Todd. Messer, who is hitting .463 through 35 games, is third in the conference for batting average. She leads the team with 57 hits, 34 runs scored and five triples and also boasts a .610 slugging percentage. She has stolen 14 bases this season in 17 attempts. Todd is second on the team with a .402 batting average and she is second on the squad with 47 hits and 30 runs scored, but she leads the tea with 16 stolen bases. Stephanie Pilkington is third on the team with a .337 batting average and she leads the team with 26 RBI.

USA is second in the league with a team earned run average of 2.11 led by Devin Brown's 1.43 ERA. Through 25 appearances she boasts a 14-7 record - including nine shutouts - has pitched 141.2 innings and 18 complete games and has struck out 226 batters. Her ERA and strikeouts have her at the top of the conference in those two categories. Behind Brown, Destin Vicknair holds a 2.69 ERA in 16 appearances and is 10-3 on the season with eight complete games and a pair of shutouts to her name. She

has pitched 83.1 innings and struck out 68 batters.

[USA ROSTER](#)

[USA SCHEDULE](#)

[USA STATISTICS \(PDF\)](#)

UP NEXT

The Eagles will next hit the road for six games, including a Sun Belt Conference series at Troy next weekend. First for Georgia Southern, though, will be Southeastern Conference foe South Carolina. The Eagles and Gamecocks will play in Columbia, S.C. Tuesday, Apr. 19 at 6 p.m. The single game will be the fifth time this season that GS will have played on the SEC Network+.

WEEKLY AWARD FOR RALEY

Georgia Southern softball player [Dixie Raley](#) has been named the Madness Sun Belt Softball Player of the Week by College Sports Madness.

Raley, a freshman from Milledgeville, Ga., had a stellar weekend on the mound for Georgia Southern, securing two of the Eagles' three wins over longtime rival Appalachian State – including a shutout in game-3 – while setting a new career-high for strikeouts. She was so effective on the mound, that her opponents hit just .146 against her over the 14 innings she pitched and she finished the weekend with a 1.00 earned run average and 18 strikeouts, six looking. Raley is now tied for second in the conference with 16 wins and she is third in strikeouts (139) as well as strikeouts looking (48), fourth in innings pitched (135.2) and fifth in opposing batting average (.228).

In Raley's first appearance of the weekend, a 6-2 win in game-1 on Saturday, Raley pitched the complete game and surrendered just four hits and a pair of runs while striking out four batters. In that game, she did not surrender a hit through the first two innings and gave up just two hits over the final four frames.

The next day, Raley was outstanding in the circle as she guided the Eagles to a 3-0 victory to secure the weekend sweep over the Mountaineers. Raley pitched the complete game in her third shutout of the season and allowed just three hits and three walks while striking out a career-high 14 batters, four looking. She led off the game by securing the Eagles' first 6 outs via strikeout and then proceeded to strike out two batters in each of the next three innings. Over the final four innings of the game, Raley gave up just one hit and did not walk a single batter.

WEEKLY AWARD FOR WITKOWSKI

Georgia Southern softball player [Lydia Witkowski](#) was named the Sun Belt Conference Community Coffee Student-Athlete of the Week as released by the conference office on Tuesday, Mar. 15.

A redshirt freshman from Alpharetta, Ga., Witkowski led Georgia Southern on offense in the Eagles' Sun Belt Conference opening series at Texas State as the Eagles went 2-1

in San Marcos. The Eagles' starting left fielder went 6-for-11 (.545) at the plate with a triple and an RBI and scored a pair of runs herself. She slugged .727 with eight total bases and finished the three games with a .545 on-base percentage.

In the field, she recorded four putouts and had an assist in the first game when she gunned down a runner tagging up at third, trying to make it home. The throw out at home from left field completed one of the Eagles' two double plays on the weekend.

In the first game of the series, Witkowski went 4-for-4 at the plate with three singles and a triple for a 1.500 slugging percentage. She also batted in a runner and scored a pair of runs herself as the Eagles defeated Texas State 6-1. Witkowski followed that up by going 2-for-4 at the plate in the Eagles' 5-4 win over the Bobcats in the first game of a Sunday doubleheader, sealing the series victory for the Eagles. The win also pushed the Eagles' longest winning streak of the season to eight games.

YEAR NO. 5

Georgia Southern head coach [Annie Smith](#) is in her fifth season at the helm of the Eagles. Her tenure in Statesboro has taken the Eagles to new heights with two SoCon Regular Season Championships and two SoCon Tournament Championships as well as overseeing the transition to the Sun Belt Conference in Smith's four previous seasons. During her tenure, Smith has advanced to the NCAA Tournament twice (2012 and 2013) as the Eagles have quickly made a name for themselves within the regional and national landscape.

Smith has an overall career record of 146-127. In 2014, she became the fastest coach in Georgia Southern history to reach 100 career wins when her team posted a 4-0 victory over Appalachian State on April 5.

Smith joined Georgia Southern with 16 years of experience as a collegiate assistant coach, serving at Missouri for six seasons before heading to Mississippi State for nine years, handling all aspects of the program. In 2006, Smith was promoted to associate head coach of the Bulldogs.

RANDOM STATS AND NOTES

Career Games Started - by position (active)

[A.J. Hamilton](#): 211 total - 211 C

[Emily Snider](#): 148 total - 148 OF

[Morgan Robinson](#): 145 total - 145 1B

[Taylor Rogers](#): 113 total - 81 OF; 32 DP

[Alesha Mann](#): 92 total - 51 SS; 34 2B; 7 DP

[Michelle Mazur](#): 48 total - 42 3B; 3 DP; 3 OF

[Kierra Camp](#): 38 total - 38 P

[Rowan McGuire](#): 30 total - 30 DP

[Heather Felt](#): 15 total - 15 P

[Hannah Farrell](#): 41 total - 41 3B

[Lydia Witkowski](#): 41 total - 38 OF; 3 INF

India Davis: 38 total - 37 2B; 1 SS

Dixie Raley: 23 total - 23 P

Macy Weeks: 21 total - 13 DP; 8 OF

Haley Carter: 5 total - 5 DP

EAGLES BY STATE (18)

Georgia: 13

Florida: 2

Illinois: 2

Tennessee: 1

EAGLES BY CLASS (18)

Seniors: 1

Juniors: 6

Sophomores: 6

Freshmen: 5 freshmen (3 redshirt)

Georgia Southern Athletics provides up-to-date information on all its sports through its official website, GSEagles.com, through social media channels [facebook.com/GSAthletics](https://www.facebook.com/GSAthletics), twitter.com/GSAthletics, iOS app Georgia Southern Eagles and Android app Eagles GATA. Fans can purchase tickets to Georgia Southern Athletics events by visiting [GSEagles.com/Tickets](https://www.GSEagles.com/Tickets).

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