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VBALL Season Preview: Outside Hitters and Middles

Four-part 2016 season preview heading into Friday's opening match.

Marc Gignac



Cathrine Murray (top) and Lauren Reichard (bottom).

Women's Volleyball | 8/24/2016 10:41:00 AM

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Penn State Classic Tournament Central

STATESBORO, Ga. – The Georgia Southern volleyball program will look to get back to its winning ways as it begins year three in the Sun Belt Conference.

Coming off back-to-back 25-win seasons and an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2013, the Eagles joined the Sun Belt in 2014 with high expectations. Injuries to three starters decimated the team in year one, and erratic, inconsistent play proved to be the Eagles' Achilles heel last season.

With five starters and all-league libero [Alex Beecher](#) back, the Eagles look to turn the corner in 2016. With a blend of 10 veterans and 10 newcomers in the gym this preseason, head coach [Dustin Wood](#) has noticed a different level of intensity and competition than in years past.

"The thing that we've noticed this year is that they are really holding each other accountable, and feelings aren't getting hurt," Wood said. "They understand that this is what we need to do to get better. They are showing signs of being direct and honest with each other and that they are out there to win."

Below is the second piece in a four-part series previewing the 2016 season.

Outside Hitters

Seven outside hitters to man the pins are on the roster this season as Wood looks to shore up one of the inconsistent areas of last year's lineup.

It will be a more seasoned group with [Cathrine Murray](#) entering her junior season with 57 career matches under her belt and sophomore [Stephanie Spencer](#) having played in 101 sets as a freshman. "Cathrine has developed some really good leadership skills," Wood said. "She's matured mentally, and the game is slowing down for her. Stephanie came into camp really strong. She has matured big time mentally and physically, and she's healthy after laboring through some things last year."

[Anna Wenger](#), a junior transfer from Akron, also provides plenty of collegiate match experience.

"Anna is working on figuring out the little details of our system and the connections with our setters," Wood said."

Sophomore [Julia Landavazo](#) and freshmen [Ryan Tuten](#), [Carly Turner](#) and [Kendall Adams](#) will vie for playing time.

"The luxury is the depth we have at that position in case one of them are off one night," Wood said. "It's going to be outside by committee, and that's a luxury we haven't had so we're pretty excited about that group. The young ones will probably see the floor. At practice, they are battling each and every day and making each other better."

The group also can provide some options in certain serve/receive situations.

"We're not all jump serves and we're not all float serves so if we see another team struggling with something, we can attack it with what we need," Wood said. "We have tons of options this year that we haven't had."

Middles

The Eagles are a little thin in terms of numbers along the front line. Wood likes the talent level at the position but noted that there will be a true freshman starting each night. In addition to providing defense at the point of attack, Georgia Southern would like to get more offense from its middles this season.

"We're going to be young but good so we're doing some things in our offensive and defensive systems to make things a little easier for them," Wood said. "We're not going to put any of them in a bad situation."

Sophomore [Lauren Reichard](#), who played in 92 sets and averaged 1.55 kills and 1.01 blocks as a freshman, is the veteran.

"Lauren has come back from injury in the spring and has been a beast," Wood said. "She's doing everything well. Her arm is a lot more efficient. Her offensive numbers and blocking numbers are going to go up. She was put through the fire last year, but now she's experienced and understands the little things better."

[Reilly Bosworth](#) and [Kacey Baker](#) are freshmen who will have to learn on the job. Bosworth is a sound, fundamental player, who will see a lot of action early on. Baker is out with an injury until late September or early October.

"Reilly works really hard at practice," Wood said. "Sometimes you forget she's a freshman because of the way she moves and works out there."

The Eagles open the campaign Friday against No. 19 North Carolina at the Penn State Classic. Tomorrow, we preview the defensive specialists.

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