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VBALL Season Preview: Defensive Specialists

Georgia Southern University

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VBALL Season Preview: Defensive Specialists

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

Marc Gignac

Joscelin Morrow (top) Alex Beecher (bottom).

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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 third piece in a four-part series previewing the 2016 season.

Defensive Specialists
The Eagles have plenty of depth in the back row and will be led by fifth-year senior libero Alex Beecher, who is already the school's all-time leader in digs. She was named second-team all-league after ranking 10th in the country in digs per set (5.57) despite playing a majority of the season on a torn ACL.

"She's been performing at a high level; we're just trying to get her more consistent," Wood said. "We're looking forward to seeing what Alex can do when she's healthy."

Sophomore Casey McColl has been hot on her heels in the preseason after coming on late in her freshman campaign and posting five digs against Arkansas State in the Sun Belt Tourney.

"Casey has been right on Alex's tail, which is creating some competition in practice," Wood said. "It's making both of them better."

Sophomore Joscelin Morrow returns with a good bit of experience after playing in 33 matches last season, and newcomers Ashley Dean, Brooke Birch and Kelsey Meins give the Eagles lots of options.

"It's a good core – two or three of them are going to be playing each night," Wood said. "It's a young but experienced group, and there is depth there. There are some servers we can pop in. We're just looking for consistent passing from them and getting their nose dirty."
The Eagles open the campaign Friday against No. 19 North Carolina at the Penn State Classic. Tomorrow, we preview the schedule.

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