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# WBB Season Preview: Year Two for Drown and Staff Starts with Seasoned Veterans

*Eagles return 10 letterwinners and all five starters from last year*



Women's Basketball | 10/28/2016 2:00:00 PM

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Below is the first in a three-part series previewing the Eagles' 2016-17 season.

**STATESBORO** – When [Kip Drown](#) took over the reins of the Georgia Southern

women's basketball program over a year ago, he knew the rebuild would be a process that required him, his staff and the players to be patient. After the first year, the Eagles are looking to take the next step in building a successful program and they will have plenty of experience to draw from both on the coaching side as well as on the court.

"We as a staff and as a team are leaps and bounds ahead of where we were this time last year," Drown said. "Players need repetition to get better. So, when they go through a system for one year, now when you tell them something 'boom' it kicks back in for them. Now, they're able to take that and execute it at an even higher level.

"And the comfort level is so important," Drown continued. "Last year, we were walking around on eggshells trying to think and play and you can't execute this game properly in that manner. You have to be able to just react to situations. We're seeing that now with our returners and it's exciting. I'm anxious for when we are able to get them onto the floor together in a game-setting and get that cohesiveness that they developed. I'm excited to see how they perform once the lights go on."

Last season, the Eagles went 7-22 overall and 4-16 in Sun Belt Conference play, but they could have just as easily been 15-14 overall and in the top half of the league. GS had nine games that were decided by 10 or fewer points and went 1-8 in those games, including five losses decided by five points or less, four in conference games. Those are the games that Drown hopes his players learned the most from and are ready to win this year.

To get over the proverbial hump, the Eagles will turn to their experienced veterans who have played a collective 518 games, including 234 games started. The group of 10 returners have corralled in 1,325 rebounds and scored 2,818 points.

But the in-game stats are not the only tell-tale that the team should be better in year-two. It's what has happened in the off-season that has Drown optimistic for the new season.

"We could tell from the first day of our off-season workouts this year the level of intensity, the comfort level for the players, it was just at a much higher level than it had been at any time last year," Drown said. "And I felt it carried over and got better as we went into the summer workouts. I thought the team got a lot better, felt they took the opportunity to get better not only in their organized workouts but also on their own. We had several players who spent a lot of extra time in the gym this summer. It's really exciting when you get to that point because they are starting to buy into what our staff is trying to do. I felt like our off-season and summer workouts were extremely good and were at a totally different level of intensity and concentration than when we entered the season last year."

Despite being chosen 10<sup>th</sup> in the Preseason Sun Belt Conference Coaches' Poll, the team isn't looking to just roll over. The Eagles return plenty of talent and are a year older with more experience overall while also adding key pieces at every position. Last

season, the Eagles had plenty of depth at certain positions, but were inexperienced at others. With at least three players at every position this year, and some players cross-trained at multiple positions, GS is prepared to take the next step.

"Depth is a critical thing in college athletics," Drown said. "You're always facing things whether it be injuries, ineligibility or other factors. There is always something that comes up that affects your rotations and affects the people you're able to put out on the floor. When you're able to go into a game and know that we have 10 players who have spent a year in our system, that know our system and are playing at a pretty good level within it, it gives us a lot of flexibility to be able to handle all of those hurdles that may come.

"Every day in practice we change up the teams that we put our players on because we want them to have played with different personnel because you never know in the course of a game, with foul trouble or other situations, who you're going to have available to play at a certain time," Drown continued. "We want everyone to be comfortable playing with the rest of the team. But we are also at that point in the preseason where we need to start creating who that top group is going to be. To be honest, a rotation of eight is the easiest for a coach to manage, but with our group we are probably going to try to go at least 10 deep and we may even try to get an 11<sup>th</sup> in. We have to start getting those rotations and those groups together a little more because we have the exhibition on Tuesday night, but more so in preparation for North Carolina A&T game on Nov. 11. That's the one we're really shooting for right now as far as figuring out what our rotations will be like."

Included in the 10 returners are five players who started a majority of the games last season for the Eagles as well as the top three scorers and top three rebounders. Seniors [Angel McGowan](#), [Patrice Butler](#) and [Alexis Sams](#) highlight the veteran group and will be relied upon even more heavily than a year ago.

McGowan was voted a first-team Preseason All-Sun Belt Conference selection by the league's coaches earlier this month and Butler was tabbed a third-team selection. The duo were the team's leading scorers and Butler was also one of the top rebounders on the squad a year ago. Last season, Sams rarely left the court while running Drown's offense from the point despite being more comfortable as a shooting guard. McGowan, an All-Sun Belt Conference Second-Team selection in 2015-16, also rarely left the court and was also asked to take on a slightly different role at times, but this year, both will be able to move back into their more familiar positions.

Also returning are [Trellanie English-Lurry](#), [Rhein Beamon](#), [Sierra Butler](#), [Alexis Foulks](#), [Jessica Marcus](#) and [Bri Reece](#), all of whom were key components last season and contributed at key moments. Last season, English-Lurry worked at transitioning from a shooting guard into a second point guard for the Eagles and will continue that role in the upcoming campaign. Fellow juniors [Sierra Butler](#) and Foulks as well as Beamon, a sophomore, will also see an expanded role as the Eagles look to push the tempo of the game and give teams different looks both on offense as well as defense.

Rounding out the Eagles' 10 returners, redshirt sophomore [Jakayvea Akins](#) returns to run the offense from the point, a move that will allow Sams and McGowan to slide back over to their familiar spots and will give Drown and staff the opportunity to turn the tempo up.

"You just can't coach experience," Drown said. "When you look at the NCAA Tournament and see the six seeds, eight seeds, 10 seeds knocking off higher-seeded schools, it's teams that have juniors and seniors that are doing that. It's that experience factor that you really can't coach."

Even with all the experience, Georgia Southern will benefit from five newcomers that will push the veterans to be better and will even compete for playing time sooner, rather than later.

Georgia Southern will open the season with a home exhibition game against Coastal Georgia on Tuesday, Nov. 1. The Eagles and Mariners will tip off at 7 p.m. in Hanner Fieldhouse. The Eagles will then open the regular season against North Carolina A&T on Friday, Nov. 11 at 7 p.m. with a second home game on Sunday, Nov. 13 at 2 p.m. against Thomas University.

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