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# WBB Season Preview Part 3: Schedule Offers Eagles Plenty of Chances for Growth and Success

*GS plays 11 non-conference games, 14 total home games*



Milledge Austin

Women's Basketball | 11/2/2016 2:15:00 PM

## Story Links

Preview schedule:

Oct. 28 – Veterans

Oct. 31 – Newcomers

Today – The Schedule

Below is the final piece in a three-part series previewing the Eagles women's basketball team 2016-17 season.

**STATESBORO** – Last season, the Georgia Southern women's basketball team had nine games that were decided by 10 points or less. The Eagles ended the year 7-22, including 1-8 in those nine games, but they could just as easily have been 15-14 and in the top half of the league. Second-year head coach [Kip Drown](#) is hoping his team is ready to take the next step during the 2016-17 season and that will mean winning those close games, sometimes on the road.

"We expect to compete this year. We know we were picked 10<sup>th</sup> in the Sun Belt, but we still expect to go out and compete with everyone in the league and on our schedule," Drown said. "We don't want to put a number on it, but we expect to see improvement in our performance, in our final standing in the league and in our number of wins. I think our players have bought in. We have worked hard in the off-season – as hard as anyone else – and because of that, we feel like we are as capable as anybody to compete for a championship and that's our mindset. I think our number-one thing is to learn how to win close games and I believe the experience of being in close games last year will help us grow and improve this year."

The Eagles will have plenty of opportunity for growth early in the season as their non-conference schedule features 11 opponents and six games on the road. Four of those teams advanced to a national tournament last season, including three teams that participated in the Women's National Invitation Tournament (WNIT). Also included in this year's slate of out-of-conference games will be four teams the Eagles played last year. GS went 3-1 in those games.

"We have two home games in a row to open the season, but then we go on a tough stretch of four straight road games," Drown said. "We go to Clemson and while they may have been down last year, I'm sure they have brought in some people to make them better. Then we make the Alabama swing starting with Jacksonville State and then we go to Alabama who made WNIT field. Those two are before Thanksgiving, then we come home for a couple days before flying up to IUPUI who made a post-season tournament last year. We have that four-game span in about 11 days and we're going to play some pretty good basketball teams."

That early stretch away from home will offer the Eagles prime opportunities to play experienced basketball teams in preparation for later in the year. It will also give the younger players chances to play in hostile environments such as renovated Littlejohn Coliseum (Clemson), Coleman Coliseum (Alabama) and the Jungle (IUPUI).

Following the first long road swing, the Eagles return home for their annual Field Trip Day against in-state rival Mercer with over 2,000 local elementary and middle school students expected to pack Hanner. GS will then hit the road for the final time in 2016, traveling the short distance to Savannah State before trekking up the coast to Charleston Southern.

"I think our non-conference schedule is a very solid schedule. It will challenge us, but I also think it's a competitive schedule for us and we can compete against everyone on

that schedule," Drown said. "It's just a matter of us getting some confidence and getting off to a good start. Compared to last year, I think our team feels a lot better about themselves but it would be good to get some wins early and build on that and really believe that we're going to be a good basketball team."

The Eagles will close out their non-conference schedule and open the Sun Belt Conference portion of their campaign with five home games in a row. Included in that stretch will be the league opener against rival Georgia State on New Year's Eve. The Eagles and Panthers will battle it out for a point in the Southern vs. State Rivalry Series in a rare 10 a.m. game.

"The game with Georgia State being at 10 a.m. will be a different feel," Drown said. "It's one of those games where you can throw out all the records and all the other factors because it's a rivalry game. It'll be a very intense and competitive battle. Then we get to stay home again for Troy, the preseason No. 1 team in the conference and South Alabama. South Alabama has a nice group back with two of the top-15 kids in the league back and their coach does an outstanding job."

"The Sun Belt is a very competitive league top to bottom, even more so than last year" Drown continued. "I don't think this year there's as big of a gap from the top to the middle to the bottom of the league. Night in and night out we just have to be ready to play and compete."

Four of the Eagles' 2016-17 Sun Belt opponents finished last year's campaign with 20 or more wins and trips to a national tournament. Troy won the Sun Belt Conference Tournament and claimed the league's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament, UL Lafayette won the Women's Basketball Invitational (WBI) and both Little Rock and Arkansas State played in the WNIT.

This year, the Sun Belt adds Coastal Carolina to the mix, setting up 18 total league games. Due to the change, the Eagles will play the Arkansas and Texas schools just once rather than split home-and-home series with each conference opponent. UT Arlington and Texas State will come to Statesboro while the Eagles will fly to Arkansas State and Little Rock.

The season ends with the second game between the Eagles and the Panthers.

Another noted change this season will see men's games being contested on a Saturday-Monday schedule while the women's games will be played on a Thursday-Saturday schedule. The dates of play will reverse for the 2017-18 season with the men's games being played on Thursdays and Saturdays and women's basketball being played on Saturdays and Mondays.

All 12 men's and women's basketball teams will travel to the 2017 Sun Belt Conference Men's and Women's Basketball Championships as the tournaments return to New Orleans and Lakefront Arena for a fourth consecutive season.

But before they can even begin to consider thinking about any of the games, Drown wants his players to focus on themselves first.

"I'm one of those people who is more focused on us at this point of the season," Drown said. "I try to focus on our team more than on other teams right now. Sure, we are worried about the other teams and will research them to try and figure out what we will see when the games roll around, but right now I'm more worried about our execution and us doing the right things."

Georgia Southern opens the regular-season next weekend with a pair of home games against North Carolina A&T and Thomas University. The Eagles and Aggies tip off the regular-season on Friday, Nov. 11 at 7 p.m. and GS plays the Night Hawks on Sunday, Nov. 13 at 2 p.m.

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