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# Georgia Southern University Athletics



## SEASON PREVIEW: GS Men's Soccer Ready To Attack The Sun Belt In 2019

Eagles were 15 minutes away from the NCAAs in 2018, but feel they have a great mix of newcomers and returners

Men's Soccer

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**STATESBORO** - On the heels of a season that featured several highlights, the one moment that remains in the back of the minds of most Eagle players and fans from the 2018 season is the Sun Belt Championship match, where Georgia Southern led 2-1 with 15 minutes remaining, only to see the season come to a close in the final in a 4-2 defeat.

Head Coach [John Murphy](#) realizes that a lot of attention could have been brought to bear on that moment through the Spring season, and heading into the Fall of 2019, but the Eagles have been focused heading into this season to simply get better, where the results on the field will take care of themselves.

"We're not beating them over the head with it," Coach Murphy said. "They know what we've done in the past, and they know what we've got to do to take that next step, which is never easy. It's all been very positive this preseason."

The truth of the matter is that in that match, the Eagles started eight of 11 underclassmen in the matchup with the Panthers. So the key for the Eagles to clear that final hurdle begins with the core group of returners going into the 2019 campaign.

## EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

The loss of a talented student-athlete such as 2018 Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year [Javier Carbonell](#) would cause most programs to take a step back, but the Eagles have 16 returners in total, including eight starters who return in 2019 to lead the team as they focus on their goals.

It starts defensively where Georgia Southern returns its starting goalkeeper and all four starting defenders from the 2018 squad, which includes senior co-captain center backs [Gonzalo Talavera](#) and [Justin Little](#). Combined with junior [Aldair Cortes](#) and sophomore [Lee Flowers](#), the quartet combined to start 64 of 68 matches on the back line and logged 5,505 minutes on the field - 87% of available minutes for the Eagles. Meanwhile, sophomore goalkeeper [Jokull Blaengsson](#) played every minute in net for Georgia Southern, collecting 60 saves and a 1.53 GAA that included four shutouts.

"The nice thing about having two junior captains, is that they come back to be senior captains," Coach Murphy said about Little and Talavera. "They've been fantastic representatives of our program, and going into their final year here, they've been a real testament to what we're trying to accomplish. They're both blue collar, hard working guys who lead by example, and have the personality traits to connect with their teammates."

Cortes gives the Eagles flexibility with their lineup as the 2019 Preseason All-Sun Belt selection has the playmaking ability to move to the midfield, as he showed in delivering a conference-leading seven assists last year. Other returning midfielders include seniors [David Rhoades](#) and [Sander Wang](#), junior [Alhaji Tambadu](#) and sophomore [Joshua Deane](#), all of whom had several starts and played important minutes last season.

"Our secondary group, like seniors David and Sander, along with our strong junior class prove that you don't have to be captains to be leaders. They're guys who believe in what we're doing, and over time they've become battle tested. All of our returners have been putting us in a good position to compete against some of the best teams in the nation."

Sophomore forward [Adam Davie](#) tallied six goals in his debut season for the Eagles, including two in his first collegiate match, and that potential landed him on the 2019 Preseason All-Sun Belt team along with Cortes. Junior [Jack Rittmeyer](#), who has played up top the last two seasons, had a very successful developmental summer and has the flexibility to now play in the back as well as up top, and the Eagles have more returning potential in junior [Cristian Medina](#), sophomore [Kareem Gharbi](#), sophomore [Cody Prentiss](#) and redshirt sophomore [Jarvian Wigfall](#), who sat out last season.

## ADDING THE PIECES TO THE PUZZLE

The Eagles have brought in a tremendous amount of talent to join with the experienced returners, and the mix has Coach Murphy thrilled with the potential that could be displayed on the field in 2019.

To help assist with Davie and the other attackers to make up for the loss of Carbonell, Georgia Southern has a diverse group of attackers new to the team in 2019. Senior transfer [Azaad Liadi](#) (Saginaw Valley State) finished third in the GLIAC with nine goals in 2018 and earned All-Conference and All-Region honors as a junior, while Oral Roberts transfer [PJ Amponsah](#) and Icelandic freshman [Asgeir Kristjansson](#) have equally impressed throughout the preseason.

"Most of our newcomers happen to be attacking players," Coach Murphy said. "With any sport, and particularly with our sport, the hardest thing to get connecting is the ability to combine and create scoring chances. Our newcomers have done very well to integrate themselves with how we play, but it's going to take time. It's hard to score goals, and at this level it's very difficult."

Another key newcomer is goalkeeper [Jose Eduardo Bomfim](#), who transfers from Lander University to push Blaengsson at the goalkeeper position. He was a Peach Belt Goalkeeper of the Week honoree before injury cut short his 2018 season. Freshman [Maverick Boring](#) also gives the Eagles another quality keeper to add to the competition for minutes in net.

Perhaps the most experienced newcomer of the bunch comes from former Sun Belt Conference rival Hartwick as midfielder [Jack Philp](#) was a member of the Hawks for three seasons before they dropped back down to Division III. Philp joins the Eagles as a graduate transfer and will have two seasons to play in Statesboro while he works on his master's degree. Originally from Edinburgh, Scotland, Philp has a fellow countryman as a teammate this season also as Northeast Texas CC transfer [Corey Irvine](#) (Glasgow) joins the Eagles.

As with any program, the hope is that the integration process comes quickly, but the group of newcomers that Coach Murphy has assembled have the look to be the type of team that Georgia Southern fans have come to expect.

## WHAT FANS WILL SEE IN 2019

The Sun Belt Conference is wide open in 2019, and the preseason coaches poll reflects that. Coastal Carolina is the preseason pick to win the league, but only one point separated the Chanticleers (28) from the two teams picked second - Georgia Southern and Georgia State (27 points each). The league is also back to six teams as Central Arkansas joins the league for its first season of Sun Belt play in 2019.

The Eagles played the 40th-toughest schedule in NCAA Division I last season, and this year's slate is no different as Georgia Southern opens the season at the College of Charleston's tournament by taking on NCAA participant UNC Wilmington on Friday at 5 p.m. ([LIVE STATS](#)) Eight home dates feature in the slate, starting with the home opener vs. Merrimack on September 6, and the Eagles will play a match on the Armstrong campus by hosting Jacksonville on October 1st. A Florida swing in mid-September has Georgia Southern facing Florida Gulf Coast (Sept. 8), North Florida (Sept. 13) and Stetson (Sept. 18) before returning home to take on Campbell (Sept. 21). Yearly dates with UAB (Sept. 24) and Mercer (Sept. 27) precede the JU matchup, then October features home dates against Wofford (Oct. 4) and Winthrop (Oct. 22) sandwiched around a road trip to South Carolina (Oct. 6) and the Sun Belt slate.

"During my three years in Statesboro, we have played some of the top programs in college soccer while showcasing our collective abilities quite well," Murphy said. "Once again, we will play a demanding schedule, and I'm looking forward to how our group meets these new challenges. One of the advantages of being in the Southeast is our proximity to so many quality programs and venues. We will not only go on the road for some excellent matches, but we will host several as well throughout the fall. Georgia Southern has an outstanding soccer stadium that is not only starting to get some long overdue national attention, but our support from the campus community and within Bulloch County is growing as well. Our home field is very important to us, and we look forward to more great nights with our fans in 2019."

Season tickets for the Eagles are just \$50, and include admission to all eight home matches in 2019, including the October 1st match hosted in Savannah at the Armstrong campus. You can purchase your season tickets [here](#).

Finally, Coach Murphy sheds some light on what Eagle fans will see when Georgia Southern takes to the pitch in 2019.

"The blue collar element is always going to be at the heart of what we do with our program," Coach Murphy said. "It's at the heart of the whole athletic department, and basically our school's been built on it. I've tried to recruit that way."

"I think you're going to notice a lot of pace, and our ability to run at teams, break down teams with skill and athleticism," Coach Murphy said. "We've had that in the past, but I feel we have a lot more of it this year. We'll be able to go at teams, and grind them down."

With the 2019 season starting, it's been a long nine months since the last time Georgia Southern left Eagle Field at the end of the Sun Belt title match. But that doesn't mean the Eagles have been stagnant. They've been driven to make this 2019 season be the best yet.

"This is the time where all the hard work we've been putting in since we played that final last November comes to fruition," Coach Murphy said. "We're excited about that. We feel that it's the deepest group we've had since I've been there, which is saying something since we've had some fantastic teams. But there's space for growth, which makes it even more exciting. This is a good group with potential for great things."

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