

## Eagles Win SoCon Title

Written by Phil Perry  
Monday, 26 May 2014 06:03

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Chase Griffin's bases-loaded single in the bottom of the ninth inning lifted the fourth-seeded Georgia Southern Eagles to a 4-3 win over No. 3 seed Samford in the title game of the Southern Conference

Baseball Championship at Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Park on Sunday. With the win, the Eagles have earned the SoCon's automatic bid to the NCAA Regionals.

GSU (39-21) will learn its fate Monday. The regional hosts will be announced Sunday night, while the NCAA selection show will announce pairings and the top eight national seeds on ESPNU at noon Monday.

The Eagles trailed right up until their final at-bat, falling behind 3-0 in the early innings and taking a 3-2 deficit into the final frame. GSU rallied against the most unlikely of suspects, Samford closer Andres Gracia, who had allowed just one earned run all season but surrendered two in the last of the ninth.

Aaron Mizell led off the frame with a single, and a walk to Stryker Brown put runners at second and third. Gracia dropped the ball while toeing the rubber for a balk to advance both runners before getting a foul out to first for the first out of the frame. Hunter Thomas was intentionally walked to load the bases, and Garrett Chapman singled through the left side to score Mizell and

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tie the game at 3.

Samford (35-25) then pulled center fielder T.J. Dixon and inserted Danny Rodriguez to serve as an additional infielder, but Griffin singled up the middle to drive in Brown with the title-clinching run.

The Eagles' title was their sixth in the SoCon and first since 2011. GSU was facing Samford in the title game for the third time in the last four seasons and was making its 11th appearance in the championship contest overall.

The late-game rally made a winner of Sam Howard (6-5), who threw an inning of no-hit ball in his first relief appearance of the season, and spoiled a gem from Samford starter Alex Ledford, who carried a one-hit shutout into the seventh and departed with a 3-2 lead.

Samford bolted out to a 3-0 lead in the first two innings, getting a leadoff double from Dixon and an RBI ground out from Drew McWhorter in the top of the first. The Bulldogs added two more in the second, with Brandon Powell driving in a run on another ground out and Frankie Navarrete hitting an RBI double.

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Ledford, meanwhile, was cruising, facing the minimum through the first 6 1/3 innings after a double play erased Garren Palmer's single in the second.

The Eagles finally got to Ledford in the seventh, with Ben Morgan drawing a walk with one out. Consecutive singles by Mizell and Brown drove in Morgan, and one out later, Thomas singled up the middle to bring home Mizell and knock Ledford from the game. Parker Curry came on to get a fly out to left-center to end the threat.

Caleb Bryson's single in the top of the eighth was all the offense Samford could muster the rest of the way, and the Bulldogs turned to Gracia in the bottom of the eighth looking for the six-out save.

After losing its opening game of the tournament, Georgia Southern won five straight games to win it all, becoming the second straight team to do so (Elon) and the third overall to drop its opening game and win the tourney (Furman, 1991).

Josh Wirsu took the no-decision in a six-inning start for the Eagles, allowing three runs on five hits with two walks and six strikeouts.

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Jason Richman worked two innings of scoreless, one-hit relief, striking out three. Richman's appearance was his tournament-record sixth of the tournament, and he earned Most Outstanding Player honors after posting a 0.68 ERA with 14 strikeouts in 13 1/3 innings of work, including a start on Saturday.

Gracia fell to 2-1 on the year after allowing two runs on 1 1/3 innings. He walked two and struck out one and saw his ERA increase from 0.28 to 0.79 on the season.

Bryson finished 2-for-3 with a run scored to lead the Bulldogs, while Mizell was 2-for-4 with two runs to pace Georgia Southern.

### **All-Tournament Team**

**SP – Jeffrey Springs, Appalachian State**

SP – Alex Ledford, Samford

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RP – Jason Richman, Georgia Southern

C – Daniel Gerow, Davidson

1B – Caleb Bryson, Samford

2B – Ben Morgan, Georgia Southern

SS – Dalton Busby, Georgia Southern

**3B – Michael Pierson, Appalachian State**

OF – Jake Jones, Furman

OF – Aaron Mizell, Georgia Southern

OF – Heath Quinn, Samford

DH – Alex Abrams, Furman

**Most Outstanding Player**

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