The 2006 Golden Eagle track and field teams feature a dynamic mix of veterans and newcomers with a wealth of experience and plenty of potential for the future, as it enters the season.

After the best performance in recent years at the Conference USA Championships last season, Head Coach Wayne Williams and his Lady Eagles are ready to take that performance to another level this year. Williams returns a record number of performers from last year’s squad that finished fourth at the indoor championship and second in the outdoor championship. Numerous returning veterans will key Southern Miss’ hopes during the 2006 season. Both teams are equally excited about the group of newcomers that are sure to make a name for themselves.

“We feel like we are going to be as good of a team, if not better, than last spring,” Williams said. “The women have confidence and expect to meet and exceed every challenge they face. We have the kind of talent that can be successful, and I believe we will with another year’s experience, a little bit stronger, and hopefully the confidence will be there, and we can go out again and perform at that level.”

On the men’s side, Williams will have to rely on a group of newcomers to lead the Golden Eagle team. However, the cupboard is not entirely bare. The Golden Eagles return a good nucleus of athletes that include the conference champions in the javelin, Conrad Chanove, and point scorers in the 400 meters (Cornelius Duncan) and discus (Noah Bryant).

“This year for the men, numbers continue to be down, but we hope that the athletes we have will perform at a high level, obviously, with the loss of team members of last year’s team, Marcus Polk and Marvin Lucas,” Williams said. “It’s going to be tough to replace them.”

Sprints/Hurdles

The women’s team will be led by Raquel Washington and Tanika Liburd. Washington was a 2004 and 2005 NCAA Regional qualifier in the 100 meter and holds the school record in the event. Washington turned in perhaps her best season, winning the C-USA indoor 80-meter hurdles, as well as the outdoor 100-meter hurdles. She won the regional competition and advanced to the semifinals in the NCAA National Meet.

Liburd posted the top five times in the 100 meters and posted a regional qualifying time as well. She finished second at the C-USA meet.

Seniors Angela Johnson, Erica Alston, Washington and junior Trinity McKinney will be counted on to provide points in the sprints.

“We expect good performances from Raquel and Tanika again this year,” Williams said. “Angela had a solid season last year, and we are expecting her to improve her performance in the 200 meters. She has the ability to earn us points.”

Johnson, Tori Wells, McKinney also will compete in the 200 meters. Newcomer Suesanna Williams should provide additional depth in the sprints.

“This group of athletes will provide power and a possibility of potential points in the sprint area,” Williams said.

Jocelyn Young, Candi Johnson and Adriane Battle are the front runners to earn points in the 400 meters.

“The women’s team had the best conference performances indoors and outdoors,” Williams said. “The outdoor team put together one of the best performances of any team here. We came up a little short, because we just ran out of people.”

The Lady Eagles have added depth in the hurdle events with newcomers Kenika Weaver and Terrria Owens, while returnee Ashley Reyer is expected to compete in the hurdles as well.

The men’s team will rely on some untested talent in the sprints to help replace Polk. Williams has three athletes with experience in Cedric Collins, Edward Pearce and Robert Johnson. The Golden Eagles...
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Jumps

Two regional qualifiers return for the women's team in the form of Liburd (long jump) and Aaliyah Shareef (triple jump), as each hold school records. Liburd, who has been a conference champion, competed in the NCAA Championships, after finishing second in the C-USA meet last year. Liburd finished fourth in the regional competition and advanced to the NCAA National meet.

The Lady Eagles sustained a big loss in the high jump with the graduation of Krista Miller. Miller, the school record holder, advanced to regional competition the last three seasons. Reyer will take on added responsibility, competing in the high jump.

The triple jump will get a one-two punch with Shareef and newcomer Simona Costache. Shareef won the outdoor triple jump at the C-USA meet and finished eighth at the regional meet in 2005.

Also returning are Stephanie McCullum and Trinity McKinney, giving the Lady Eagles additional depth in the long jump.

"Stephanie and Trinity provided 72 points last season," Williams said. "We believe they will be able to improve on that total."

The men's high jump will feature three newcomers, Ahmed Abdelzaher, David Clyburn and Steven Green. Ahmed has the potential to score points in the C-USA meet and could be an NCAA regional qualifier.

Perhaps the biggest task for Williams is replacing Marvin Lucas. The Golden Eagles will have to rely on Ken Watson and Robert Johnson to lead a young group of jumpers. Watson finished strong last season in the long jump and triple jump, and Ron Robert will provide immediate help in the triple jump. A healthy Leonard McLeggon returning also gives the Eagles additional help in the jumps.

Throws

Conference USA javelin champion Conrad Chanove, a member of the football team, returns to lead the Eagle throwers. Senior Noah Bryant, who placed fourth at the C-USA Championship last season, returns to anchor the discus.

Marcus Brown, who had an outstanding indoor season a year ago, missed most of the outdoor season with injuries. Also returning to compete in the discus is Bobby Weakley, a member of the Golden Eagle football team.

"Last season, we had some injuries that prevented us from scoring some valuable points in the field events," Williams said. "If we continue to stay healthy, we should recover some of those points we didn't get last season with Marcus returning."

The women's team has the reigning C-USA champion in the javelin, Hana Prudilova. Prudilova, a regional qualifier, will be joined by Suesanna Williams.

"Hana was a pleasant surprise for us last season," Williams said. "She performed well for us last season, and we expect her to do the same this year. We believe she has worked hard and become stronger."

Multi/Relays

Reyer turned in solid performances in the pentathlon and heptathlon last season. Reyer finished fifth in the pentathlon during the indoor season and fourth in the heptathlon in the C-USA Championships last season. Kim Williams and newcomer Lauren Reeves give the Lady Eagles depth in the multi-event.

The Lady Eagles return the entire 4x100-meter relay team of Tori Wells, Alston, Washington and Liburd. This group finished third at the C-USA outdoor meet and posted a regional qualifying time. McLeggon is set to return to compete in the decathlon.

"We believe Leonard is capable of producing points for us in the decathlon," Williams said. "We are hopeful that he will be ready for the spring."

Once again, graduation left the 4x100 and 4x400-meter relay teams short-handed, but Williams believes the newcomers should be able to fill in and be competitive.

"We know in the men's situation with the limited number of athletes that we will have to be injury-free throughout the season," Williams said. "By the time conference time rolls around, we must perform at a high level to score the points necessary. We do have people on the top end, which can provide good points. We need the newcomers to step up and fill in some gaps, while our walk-ons need to perform at a high level, to give us additional support."

Middle Distance-Distance

Replacing the likes of Dijana Kojic in the 800 meters and Naomi Kiprotich in the 1,500 meters will not be an easy task for Williams. Senior Alisha Edwards is the top returnee in the 800-meter event, and Brittany Wood and newcomer Chris Fletcher should help in the event.

"We are expecting good things from Brittany because she had gotten stronger from a year ago," Williams said. "Cheris comes to us with solid credentials out of high school. We believe she will provide some help to us for the outdoor season."

The Lady Eagles sustained heavy losses in the distance races because of graduation. Williams will have to replace Cassandra Goodson, Becca Rop and Karen Tankersley with newcomer Ronna Sandoval, who will be counted on to perform most of the duties in the distance races.

The men's team returns the top performer in the 800 with Marvin Pinnock. Brandon McCray gives the Golden Eagles added depth in that event.

The Golden Eagles have missed out on having a performer in the distance races the last two seasons, but Will Garrett will take on the challenge of providing the team with points in the distance races.

The Golden Eagles added depth in that event.

Newcomers Frederick Baldwin, Quincy Parker and Zachary Simon will give the Golden Eagles added depth in the hurdles.

Zachary Simon will give the Golden Eagles added depth in the hurdles.

Conrad Chanove

Aaliyah Shareef

The Golden Eagles have missed out on having a performer in the distance races the last two seasons, but Will Garrett will take on the challenge of providing the team with points in the distance races.