

Auburn Overcomes inconsistent season to reach NIT semifinals

AUBURN, Ala. Auburn Men's Basketball is headed to Indianapolis to play in the semifinals of the NIT. After an inconsistent year in SEC play, late head coaching changes, and an almost completely new roster, Auburn is getting the chance to finish the season on a high note.

This year was off to a rocky start for the Auburn Tigers when Bruce Pearl announced, 42 days before this season, that he was retiring from coaching. His son, Stephen Pearl, was hired as the next head coach and was given almost an entirely new roster to work with after last year's Final Four team almost all moved on to either the NBA, other leagues, or the transfer portal. The only consistent, relevant player returning was sophomore Tahaad Pettiford.

The year started off strong with statement wins against Oregon, St. John's, and NC State. The season proved to be more difficult in SEC play. This year's team went 7-11 in SEC play while going 2-8 on the road. This was quite the opposite of last year's team going 15-3 in SEC play. There were moments such as the Florida away game that the team looked promising and as though they had turned the corner. Ultimately, this year's team could never find solid grounding, at away games or even at home.

After a short run in the SEC tournament and not making the NCAA tournament, Auburn was placed as the No. 1 overall seed for the NIT tournament. A chance at redeeming their season and capitalizing on an opportunity, the Tigers have held their heads high and made it to the semifinals on March 31.

Stephen Pearl said on AL.com, "It's not the tournament we want to be playing in, but our guys have done a great job of using this platform, using this opportunity to just go out there and hoop."

Auburn star player Tahaad Pettiford also said in an interview with AL.com, "Our goal is to win it all."

Auburn will face Illinois State in the NIT semifinals at Hinkle Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana, with the winner moving on to the championship game April 2.

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