

AU softball team struggles through up-and-down season

5/06/03

ALFRED After 10 games on a spring trip to Florida, the Alfred University softball team's record stood at 1-9. Still, second-year coach Jaime McLaughlin was optimistic good things would come to her young team. Alfred had played fourth-ranked Cortland State tough, dropping a one-run decision in extra innings, and in all but a couple games - most against tough competition - the Lady Saxons had been more than just competitive. Then came the trip home to Alfred, where a prolonged spell of poor weather kept Alfred from gaining any type of momentum. The Lady Saxons would play well, earn a victory, and then sit idle for several days waiting for snow or rain (or both) to subside. The long layoffs hurt the team, McLaughlin said. In the end, AU settled for a 4-20 record, finishing in sixth place in the Empire 8 with a 1-9 conference mark. "I was very encouraged in the beginning of the season. I really felt we'd come back (from Florida) and compete," McLaughlin said. "But a lot of things happened during the season. We'd play well and get some momentum and then not play for two weeks and lose it. Things just didn't go our way." Despite the won-loss mark, McLaughlin was pleased with her team's play. "We played hard and contended 100 percent more than we did last year," she said. "If a couple more things had gone our way, we may have played in the (conference) tournament." McLaughlin admitted that her team was hurt at times by youth and inexperience. While much of last year's squad returned, many of those players were sophomores this year. AU was helped by the return to the lineup of senior leftfielder Alicia DeAndrea (Clarks Summit, PA/Abington Heights) and senior catcher-designated hitter Sarah Mizer (Foster, RI/Ponaganset). Both were leading hitters in 2000 and 2001 who did not play last season. DeAndrea was the team's top hitter with a .333 batting average. She had a team-high .487 slugging percentage and 14 runs and shared the team lead in extra base hits (8) with Mizer. Mizer batted .257 and had a .443 slugging percentage and led the team with 12 RBIs, two homeruns and five steals. Mizer leaves Alfred as the career homerun leader with seven. "Alicia was our offensive force," McLaughlin said. "She and Sarah were the leaders of our offense. They'll be tough to replace, but we hope to use their example to build our offense around with the hitters we have coming back next year." Alfred certainly has a solid nucleus of players returning on 2004. While the team will lose sophomore third baseman Kristina Goldberg (South Salem/John Jay) to transfer she had 16 hits and seven runs batted in the rest of the infield and two of three starting outfielders return. A pair of freshmen were solid contributors in their first seasons. Adrienne Eglinger (Amityville/Amityville), who saw action primarily in right field and as a designated player, batted .300, while first baseman Emilie Vicchio (Shaker Heights, OH/Shaker Heights) batted .275 with 19 hits (second on the team) and notched a .957 fielding percentage. Junior catcher Jackie Kreamer (South Dayton/Pine Valley) batted .296 and had a .957 fielding percentage. Sophomore second baseman Andrea Crandall (Almond/Alfred-Almond) was solid in the field with a .980 fielding percentage and scored eight runs from the leadoff position. Sophomore Rachel Porter (Almond/Alfred-Almond), in her first year at shortstop after moving from leftfield, showed steady improvement in the field and was solid at the plate, knocking out 14 hits and tying for the team lead in RBIs with 12. Junior centerfielder Jacque Krycia (Hamburg/Mt. Mercy) had 14 hits and scored six runs. Freshman outfielder Shannon Patrick (Almond/Alfred-Almond) played well in the field (1.000 fielding percentage in four games) and will be expected to compete for more playing time next season. Seniors Nicole Bell (Hinsdale/Hinsdale) and Jill Petrie (Wellsville/Scio) were important role players who will be missed. Alfred's pitching was at times solid, although the Lady Saxons will look to improve in that area in 2004. Freshman Brittany Curran (Alfred/Alfred-Almond) led the team in wins with three and was on occasion virtually unhittable. Against St. John Fisher, she took a perfect game into the seventh inning but had to be pulled from the contest because of a substitution snafu in Alfred's home half of the sixth. Senior Brandi Backus (Mt. Upton/Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton) came in to finish the combined no-hitter against one of the top hitting teams in the conference. "That was one of the highlights of the year for us," McLaughlin said. Backus finished with a 1-8 record as the Lady Saxons' second pitcher, striking out 25. McLaughlin hopes Curran will build on a freshman campaign in which she went 3-10 and struck out a team-high 33 batters. Sophomore Janelle Villone (Honeoye/Honeoye) saw action in two games and will be counted on to compete for time on the mound in 2004. The AU defense played well, particularly over the second half of the season. But the team couldn't generate enough offense (66 runs in 24 games) to give its pitchers a chance to win. "Our biggest needs next season will be pitching, added depth in the outfield and some more big hitters," McLaughlin said. "Defense was the team's strong suit, but we really need to hit better. You can only stay in the game so long with good defense. You need to score runs."