

## Murray optimistic about Saxons' chance for success

8/21/00

Wealth of experience has Murray hopeful for Saxon success in 2000. The Alfred University football schedule has gotten tougher, with Eastern powerhouses Union and Ithaca added to a slate that includes holdovers Hobart, Hartwick, Grove City and Carnegie Mellon. But Saxons' Head Coach Dave Murray is optimistic his charges can improve over last season's 6-4 finish. The reason: a wealth of experience and depth on both sides of the ball and on special teams. AU has eight returning starters on offense and defense, plus all kicking and return specialists. "We have a great group returning, especially those in leadership rolls," Murray said, referring to a core of seniors who have seen significant playing time throughout their careers. "This senior class is the deepest, most experienced and talented class we've had. This is their year." The offense is deep at all skill positions, with several experienced players and solid newcomers competing for time on the offensive line and in the running and receiving games. There is depth and experience in virtually all areas on defense, most notably on the front line and at linebacker. Special teams both in the return game and in coverage are solid as well. "Overall, as a team, this will be the most talented group we've had," Murray said. "The 2000 season will be an indication of where we are as a program, because our schedule has really been turned up a notch." Here's a glance at the 2000 edition of the Saxons:

**OFFENSE:** There is no shortage at the quarterback position. Juniors Matt Gates (Cicero/Cicero-North Syracuse) and Todd Zandrowicz (East Aurora/East Aurora) shared snaps in each contest last season and will compete again this year for playing time. Senior Matt Krenzer (Churchville/Churchville-Chili), who was exceptional as the starting JV quarterback in 1999, and freshman Jon Davern (Canandaigua/Canandaigua), the 1999 New York State high school player of the year, will also compete for starting time. Murray has the luxury of two quality runners in the backfield. Senior George Eason (Oswego/Oswego), who has started off and on at fullback and tailback for three years, is joined by sophomore Jesse Raynor (Weedsport/Weedsport). Eason is a speedy back who can run away from the defense once in the open field, while Raynor, the bigger of the two, is more of a power runner with good slashing abilities. Freshman Dan Selig (Hamburg/Hamburg) will also vie for time at tailback. Junior Chuck Fortuna (Allegany/Allegany-Limestone) and sophomore Kevin Putnam (Lansing/Lansing) will compete for the starting fullback job. Junior Jason Slagle (Celoron/Southwestern), who emerged as the Saxons' biggest deep threat last season, leads the receiving corps. Slagle is unafraid to go over the middle and has the ability to come up with balls in traffic. Juniors Nick Freeman (Bolivar/Cuba-Rushford) and Brian Keenan (Canandaigua/Canandaigua) will see significant time as well. Murray said he plans utilize the tight end more in the passing attack this season, with junior Erik Werner (Warren, PA/Warren) and sophomore Mark Pierce (Utica/New Hartford) as candidates for the starting job. Three letterwinners from the offensive line are lost from last season, but Murray has plenty of reason to be optimistic about the line's abilities this year. Senior co-captain Wes Choy (Orangeburg/Pearl River), a starter his entire career at AU, anchors the line from his right guard position. He is joined by a group of youngsters who saw significant time last season. They include James Musty (Eden/Eden), a junior who started at tackle much of 1999; sophomore Larry Rossi (Hyde Park/F.D. Roosevelt), a backup tackle in 1999 who is penciled in at center this year; and fellow sophomores Dan Herrling (Weedsport/Weedsport), Steven Price (Syracuse/Henninger) and Russell Myers (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway), who gained valuable experience in starting and backup roles last year. Incoming freshman linemen include Mike McGuire (Norwich/Norwich), an All-New York State high school performer last year, and Mike Williams (Manlius/Cazenovia) and Mike McCall (Central Square/Paul V. Moore).

**DEFENSE:** The front seven is loaded with experienced and talented players. On the line, standout junior defensive tackle Todd Strong (Deposit/Deposit), the team leader in tackles for losses last year with 13, is joined by two incumbent sophomore starters: tackle Pete Gaydon (Muncy, PA/Muncy) and end Dan Raynor (Bemus Point/Maple Grove). The front line will be bolstered by the return of junior Brad Verbosky (Bemus Point/Maple Grove), a standout at linebacker and lineman for two seasons before sitting out last year. The linebacking corps is the most experienced unit on the field, with four senior letterwinners Aaron Rounds (Celoron/Southwestern) and Chris Vant (Red Creek/Liverpool-Canton) (starters from 1999) and Brandon Falk (Eldred, PA/Otto-Eldred) and Tom Phelan (Middletown/Chicopee) each of whom can play two or more of the linebacking positions. Regardless of who starts, each will see significant playing time and will be expected to have an impact. Sophomore Will Till (Forestville/Forestville) was impressive in camp and should see time as well. A solid group of freshmen linebackers seeking to gain experience include Nick Hawryschuk (Seneca Falls/Mynderse), Tom Tambe (Basom/Oakfield-Alabama), Ryan Sutphen (Glens Falls/Glens Falls) and Erich Ely (Jordan/Jordan-Elbridge). Perhaps

the least experienced unit is the defensive backfield. With the graduation of cornerback Andy Genung, the Saxons lack a standout cover corner. Seniors Joe Uderitz (Wilson/Wilson) and Craig Spangler (Hamburg/Hamburg) split time at weakside corner in 1999 and will compete for the starting jobs this year. Also vying for time at corner will be senior Rob Graham (Utica, PA/Franklin); sophomore Mark Smith (Corning/Corning East), who returns after sitting out last season; and freshman Ray Sawner (Sylvan Beach/Oneida), an All-New York State high school selection in 1999. The defensive backfield is not without experience. Senior co-captain Brian Keefer (Jamestown/Maple Grove), an All-American candidate at strong safety, has led the team in tackles the last two seasons. A punishing hitter with a great nose for the ball, Keefer provides leadership not only on defense, but also throughout the entire team. He is joined in the defensive backfield by senior Nick Selig (Hamburg/Hamburg), a starter at free safety last season.

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** The special teams unit is as solid as any on the team. Zandrowicz will once again handle punting duties, a year after ranking second in ECAC Upstate New York. Senior Ryan Rambacher (Bemus Point/Maple Grove), a starter since his freshman year, returns with some career placekicking records in sight. Eason, who holds virtually all school career kick return marks, and Raynor each averaged 20-plus yards per return in 1999. Murray said both will drop back for kickoffs this season. Slagle will be the Saxons' primary punt return man after averaging 8.5 yards per return last season.