

AU football players earn top honors from Empire 8 Conference

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ALFRED -- Alfred University's Jesse Raynor (Weedsport/Weedsport) and Aaron Meyers (Delevan/Arcade) were named Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year, respectively, by the Empire 8 Conference. Several other Alfred players earned honors from the Empire 8, which announced its all-conference teams today. Raynor, a senior tailback, rushed for 1,184 yards and 11 touchdowns and caught 15 passes, leading the Saxons to a 5-5 record (2-2 Empire 8). He broke the University's career rushing record this season and will leave AU holding most career rushing and scoring marks. He also earned a spot on the all-conference First Team as a running back and on the Second Team as a punter. Raynor was also the Saxons top kick returner, averaging 22.5 yards per return; its placekicker, making six field goals and 16 extra points; and a starting cornerback, making 16 tackles (11 solo) and breaking up four passes. He averaged 37.5 yards per punt and landed 23 kicks inside the opponents' 20-yard line. Meyers, a freshman strong safety, was the team's third-leading tackler with 79 stops (46 solo, five for loss) and two interceptions. He was given honorable mention as an all-conference defensive back. Other Saxons earning First Team All-Empire 8 honors were senior offensive lineman Sean Gollnitz (Fredonia/Fredonia); senior defensive tackle Jeremy Batt (Gowanda/Gowanda) and sophomore linebacker Brenton Brady (Rochester/Marshall). Gollnitz, a four-year letterwinner and three-year starting guard, has been one of the Saxons' most dominant and consistent offensive linemen throughout his career. He anchored a line that helped Alfred to 275.5 yards in offense per game, including nearly 150 per contest on the ground. Batt, in his second year as a starter, made 67 tackles, including 4.5 sacks and a team-leading 8.5 for loss. He also forced a fumble and intercepted a pass. Brady, a converted tailback playing his first year of defense at AU, registered a team-leading 91 tackles (65 solo, eight for loss, two sacks) while breaking up seven passes and forcing three fumbles (both tops on the team). Saxons earning Second Team honors were senior wide receiver Nick Coleman (Waverly/Waverly), junior wide receiver Jake Sprague (Johnsonburg, PA/Johnsonburg), junior defensive end Bill Battaglia (Cheektowaga/JFK), senior linebacker Erich Ely (Jordan/Jordan-Elbridge) and junior cornerback Ray Sawner (Sylvan Lake/Oneida). Coleman caught a team-leading 31 passes for 230 yards. He was also Alfred's top punt returner, averaging 11.3 yards per return. Sprague caught 30 passes for a team-high 459 yards (15.3 per catch) and a touchdown. Battaglia had 58 tackles, including 7.5 for loss and a team-leading six sacks (three in a game against Hobart). He also forced three fumbles (tied for the team lead), recovered two (one returned for a touchdown) and broke up three passes. Ely was second on the team in tackles with 82, including 1.5 for loss. He also had two fumble recoveries and four pass breakups. Sawner made 42 tackles (29 solo) and had a team- and conference-leading five interceptions. He also shared the team lead in pass breakups with seven. Five teams -- Alfred University, Hartwick College, Ithaca College, St. John Fisher College and Utica College -- compete in the Empire 8 in football. Two other schools, Springfield (MA) and Norwich (VT) will join the conference next year for football only.