

## AU men's swimming and diving team set to defend state and conference crowns

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SYRACUSE -- The Alfred University men's swimming and diving team will defend its New York State and Empire 8 Conference titles at the Upper New York State College Swimming Association championships this week in Syracuse. The meet, which runs from Thursday to Saturday, Feb. 26-28, is being held at Nottingham High School in Syracuse. The Saxons won their first-ever state and conference titles at last year's UNYSCSA meet in Webster. The Empire 8 conference title is determined by taking results from Empire 8 swimmers at the state meet. AU head coach Brian Striker likes his team's chances of repeating this year. "We've been swimming some really fast times. It's going to be very competitive. Ithaca's tough and RPI and Hartwick have solid teams. And RIT and LeMoyne have some very good swimmers," said Striker, who was named UNYSCSA men's coach of the year in 2002-03, his first season at the Saxons' helm. "But it's by no means a sure thing for us. We're probably underdogs." Alfred returns one state champion to this year's meet. Junior Kevin Martin (Conesus/Livonia) took the 2003 title in the 100 butterfly. He was conference champ in that event and runner-up in the 50 freestyle. Senior Mike Dube (Williamsburg, VA/Lafayette) placed third in the state meet in the 200 backstroke and was conference champ in the same event. Sophomore Brian Gotham (Syracuse/Nottingham) took home the Empire 8's top rookie honors as a freshman last year after placing third in the 200 breaststroke at the 2003 state meet. The Saxons also won conference crowns in the 200 and 800 freestyle relays. Senior Matt Weems (Arlington, VA/Washington & Lee), a member of both those relay teams, was a conference runner-up in the 200 freestyle last year. Martin has continued his success this year. As Alfred's top scorer in dual meets, he has nine wins and six runner-up finishes and has also swum on six winning relays. Gotham, who will be swimming in the same pool where he starred in high school, is the second-leading scorer in dual meets, with 16 top-three finishes, including six wins. Dube and sophomore Alex Crowell (Wayland, MA/Wayland) each have six dual meet wins this year. Several other members of this year's team -- including seniors Jack Stover III (Naples/Naples), Matt McNamara (Livonia/Livonia), Brendan Miller (Auburn/Auburn) and Bill Brown (Chaffee/Pioneer) -- placed in last year's UNYSCSA championships and will look to improve their performance this year. A solid group of veterans are joined this year by some talented youngsters, including junior diver Patrick O'Neill (Warren, PA/Warren), five dual meet wins; freshman Brandon Striker (Caledonia/York), 10 top-three finishes in dual meets, including four victories; sophomore Jay Ferrio (Allentown, PA/Emmaus), four dual meet wins, and junior Nick Bradley (King Ferry/Southern Cayuga), seven top-three dual meet finishes. Striker said his senior-laden team has worked hard to defend their state and conference crowns, and their efforts have been replicated by the youngsters. "They're all very determined," he said. "They're ready to step up and defend the title." Striker is hopeful some members of the team can qualify for the NCAA Division III championships next month. No AU swimmers qualified for the meet last year. "Last year I thought it was about fifty-fifty" Alfred would be represented at the