

Hard work, determination have AU women's basketball excited about upcoming season

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ALFRED, NY The Alfred University women's basketball team enters the 2004-05 season with confidence. Seventh-year head coach Michele Finn has high expectations for this year's team, with a solid group of returnees and a talented group of freshmen. Finn will have all five starters back from last year's team, which went 5-20 (1-13 Empire 8) with the exception of Melissa Buck. Buck graduated from AU after a career that saw her rank eighth on Alfred's all-time assist list and earn a selection to play in the New York State Women's Collegiate Athletic Association senior all-star game. Though Buck was instrumental in her career at AU, Finn feels she has a hard working group that will help to overcome her departure. "We have a good core of returning starters," Finn said. "They know the things that must be done to win. They are hungry and are ready to get at it this season." Among those starters returning is senior guard and tri-captain Michelle Kelly (Levittown/Gen. Douglas MacArthur). Kelly averaged a team-high 9.3 points and shot a team-high 30 percent from three-point range before being injured late last season. She provides a great outside threat and sees the floor well. She comes into the 2004-05 season healthy with expectations of being a double-digit scorer and a strong floor leader. Junior forward and tri-captain Meghan Coddington (Amherst, NH/Souhegan) also returns from last year's group of starters and looks to build on the success she had as a sophomore. She averaged 8.7 points (second on the team) and a team-high 8.6 rebounds for the Lady Saxons last year. Coddington earned honorable mention all-conference team honors for Empire 8. She works hard on the floor and is a strong presence in the paint both offensively and defensively. Coddington will receive help down low from junior Kylene Knoll (Elmira/Elmira Free Academy) who started 19 of 25 games last season. Standing at 6-0, Knoll scored an average of 8.3 points and grabbed 6.4 rebounds per contest. She is a big presence in the paint and Finn feels she "has the tools to be a breakout player in the Empire 8." The development of Coddington and Knoll down low has Finn excited about the inside game in the upcoming season. "Meghan Coddington and Kylene Knoll will give us a good one two punch in the post," Finn said. "Both were starters last year, so they have experience playing together." Returning to help Kelly in the backcourt is sophomore guard Megan Sampsell (Corry, PA/Corry Area). Sampsell started in 24 of 25 games as a freshman and averaged 5.6 points and 3.2 rebounds while dishing out a team high 60 assists. She started at the point spot last year and is expected to fulfill that position again in the upcoming season. She is a good perimeter shooter who handles the ball well and has great vision on the floor. Junior guard Patricia Affeldt (Horseheads/Horseheads) returns after being sidelined late last season with an injury. Affeldt enters her second year as a Lady Saxon captain and provides Finn with a vocal leader on the court. She is capable of playing either guard position and has the ability to take it strong to the hole. In 19 games last season, Affeldt averaged 1.8 points and grabbed 1.1 rebounds. Senior Colleen Lyons (Oakfield/Oakfield-Alabama) and junior Stacy Bradley (Corland/Dryden) return from last year's team and look to have an impact for the Lady Saxons. Lyons was limited last year due to a late season injury but averaged 1.7 points and 2.4 rebounds per contest. She is a strong defensive force and will see more minutes this season. Bradley came off the bench last year and played well in the paint. At 5-11 she matches up well defensively and is expected to have a big impact in the post. Finn can count on having depth in the guard position with the return of sophomores Gretchen Weidner (Eden/Eden) and Denae Foster (Arkport/Arkport). Weidner spent most of last season as a role player, appearing in 13 games. Finn likes her attitude and looks for her to step up this season and log more minutes for the Lady Saxons. Weidner is a quick, scrappy player who can get after people on defense. Foster saw time in 20 games last season. She worked hard in the off-season getting stronger and should see quality minutes this year. She has the ability to penetrate the defense and will be a good leader on the floor. The Lady Saxons will welcome several new faces to the team this year in what Finn calls "a good group of freshmen." Guard Amanda Williams (Houghton/Cuba-Rushford) has the ability to penetrate and finish. Williams is a good lefty outside shooter who can play more than one position on the floor. Catherine Hoffman (Belmont/Genesee Valley) is a versatile player who, at 6-0 can shoot from three-point range and also play in the post making her tough to guard. Guard Danielle Sayegh (Allegany/Allegany-Limestone) is a fundamentally sound player that can make an impact on both ends of the court. Finn will also have help from freshmen Angelina Accary (Freeport/St. Mary's) and Stephanie Hankins (Norfolk, VA/Graney), who look to come in and develop into everyday players for the Lady Saxons. Accary and Hankins each play the guard spot, giving AU even more depth at that position. With a fairly large group of newcomers, Finn hopes that her players can learn to play together quickly. As with any team, each player excels in a certain area of the game, so it is important that the girls recognize these strengths and build off them to reach their goal of playing in the Empire 8 tournament. "We have very

good team chemistry this year," Finn said. "Each player is different in what they can do, so it will be important that they learn each others' tendencies and get comfortable playing together. This is a great bunch of girls that are unselfish and ready to win, so there is no doubt they will work hard and do what has to be done." "This year we will focus on the fundamentals of basketball," the head coach said. "A balanced team effort along with communication on defense will be major factors in determining the success of this team. Hard work and staying healthy will be critical in achieving our ultimate goal of playing late into February." "The attitude among the team this year, combined with the success the group had late last year, give Finn and the rest of the coaching staff hope going into the 04 -05 campaign. The team is looking forward to the upcoming year and cannot wait to take the court for the first time this season." "My assistant and I are really excited about the season," Finn said. "We have high expectations going in. The girls have a lot of energy, and they are just waiting for that starting gate to rise, so they can come out strong from start to finish."