

Defense set to lead the way for the AU women's softball team this season

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ALFRED, NY Entering her fourth season as head coach of the Alfred University women's softball program, Jamie McLaughlin is excited about the improvements the team has made over her first three years at the helm. "Last year was our best season since I arrived and everything has only improved since then," said McLaughlin. With the return of an experienced infield and the addition of strong talent at the plate and on the mound, there is plenty of reason to be optimistic and excited about the 2005 season. The loss of seniors Jaclyn Kreamer and Jacque Krycia to graduation will create a void in the lineup, but McLaughlin is confident her players can take over where they left off. "Losing Kreamer and Krycia left big holes to fill at catcher and centerfield, but we have the talent and experience to fill those spots," the coach said. The reason for McLaughlin's optimism is due largely in part to the pitching staff she will have available this season. Junior Brittany Curran (Alfred, NY/Alfred-Almond) returns to the mound after a strong season that saw her receive Empire 8 All-Conference Second Team honors. Curran appeared in every game as a sophomore, finishing with a 3.89 ERA and 100 strikeouts. McLaughlin hopes to develop a dynamic one-two punch with the arrival of junior transfer Heidi Brooks (Wayland, NY/Wayland-Cohocton). Brooks was a two-time All-American at Corning Community College, posting a 0.67 ERA and a 28-5 record last season. She will be looked upon to split time on the mound with Curran. "Brooks will be a solid addition in the field and at the plate," McLaughlin said. "She and Curran will compliment each other on the mound." AU will seek leadership from seniors Courtney Briganti (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo) and Andrea Crandall (Alfred, NY/Alfred-Almond). Briganti started 26 games in the outfield last season, finishing with a .203 batting average and four stolen bases. "Courtney is very quick and a tremendous slap bunter," stated McLaughlin. "We look for her to get on base and use her speed to get into scoring position." Crandall spent her junior season as the starting second baseman, appearing in 25 games. "Andrea is a quick player that provides a wall for us in the infield" said McLaughlin. She finished the 2004 season with a .808 fielding percentage and eight runs scored. With a core group of starters returning from last year's squad, defense provides little concern for McLaughlin. Returning at the corner infield positions for AU will be sophomore third baseman Lauren Mastin (Springwater, NY/Wayland-Cohocton) and junior first baseman Emily Vicchio (Shaker Heights, OH/Shaker Heights). Mastin started in 27 games at third base last season, finishing with a .282 batting average and a team-high 14 RBIs. Vicchio batted .256 and scored 10 runs as a sophomore. She also finished the season with a .974 fielding percentage, accounting for only five errors. Joining Crandall up the middle will be freshman Ashley Gelser (Scio, NY/Genesee Valley) who looks to jump into the starting shortstop role. "Ashley is a very quick player that is strong at the plate," McLaughlin said. "She will provide a solid addition both offensively and defensively." Sophomore Jennifer Close (Lodi, NY/South Seneca) and a pair of newcomers junior Marlene Lopez (The Bronx, NY/Law and Government) and freshman Elizabeth Johnson Kennedy (NY/Kennedy) could all see time in the infield. Lopez and Johnson each have the ability to play several different positions on defense. Returning to accompany Briganti in the outfield will be sophomore Adrienne Eglinger (Amityville, NY/Amityville), who appeared in 27 games last season, hitting .240 with, a team-high, 12 runs scored. Also sharing time in the outfield will be junior Catherine Rieck (Walworth, NY/Gananda). Rounding out the outfield will be a talented group of freshmen including Andrea Sarro (Long Island City, NY/Washington Irving), Quinn Wonderling (Brookville, PA/Brookville Area) and Amanda McMinn (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway). "Andrea has a very strong arm, Quinn is extremely quick and Amanda is a natural lefty with a good bat," McLaughlin said. "All are expected to be solid additions to our outfield." McMinn will also share time on the mound. McLaughlin will have different options behind the plate with the return of sophomore Gretchen Weidner (Eden, NY/Eden) and the arrival of freshman Diane Rumbold (Simsbury, CT/Simsbury). Weidner was second on the team in average last season, batting .299, and RBIs, finishing with 10. Rumbold provides another offensive threat and will share time at catcher. The head coach is confident that her squad has the talent and mental toughness to be one of four teams playing in the Empire 8 tournament at season's end. "We are strong mentally and getting stronger physically," exclaimed McLaughlin. "Our talent and our knowledge of the game will help in getting baserunners in scoring position, so we can bring them across the plate." "This is a very cohesive group, and the unity among the squad continues to build," she said. "We will work together, one pitch, one game at a time. I am very excited about the season and anxious to step onto the field."