

AU men's tennis looks to build off depth and experience in 2005

2/25/05

ALFRED, NY Going into the 2005 men's tennis season, Alfred University men's tennis coach Brian Friedland is optimistic about his team's potential but is aware of the tough road that lies ahead. "I feel the competition in the Empire 8 is the best it's been since the conference was formed, without question," Friedland said. AU will be without graduating senior Dave Streib, but Friedland likes his team's chances for success, thanks to the return of last year's top five singles players and the addition of some promising newcomers. The key returnee from last year's 6-6 team (3-5 Empire 8) will be senior Randy Vecchione (Seaford, NY/Seaford), who will hold one of the top two singles spots this season. Vecchione finished the 2004 season with a 10-2 record overall in singles (8-2 second singles; 2-0 first singles) on his way to being named a First Team Empire 8 All-Star. Also returning will be seniors Kevin Dillon (Wellsville, NY/Scio) and Tim Inthirakoth (West Henrietta, NY/Bishop Kearney) and juniors Steve Ventura (Hilton, NY/Hilton) and Andrew Lee (Scarsdale, NY/Trinity Pawling). Dillon finished 9-3 in 2004, going 6-3 in fourth singles, 2-0 in third singles and 1-0 in fifth singles. He teamed with Vecchione to go 8-4 in first doubles, earning the pair Second Team All-Conference doubles honors. Lee will look to pick up where he left off last season when he finished 9-3 overall in singles. Lee played primarily at fifth singles, where he went 6-3, but posted a combined 3-0 mark in third and fourth singles. He and Ventura posted an 8-3 doubles record (3-0 second, 5-3 third). Ventura and Inthirakoth return after going 5-7 and 1-10 respectively in singles play. Ventura was 2-0 in second singles, 2-7 in third singles and finished 1-0 in fourth singles. Inthirakoth spent most of the season in first singles (0-10), earning his lone singles win at the sixth position. He paired with Streib to go 2-0 in third doubles. Other returnees who will provide depth for the Saxons are senior Kristopher Bean (Yarmouth, ME/Yarmouth) and sophomore Garri Stratiev (Brooklyn, NY/Fort Hamilton). Bean has a 7-8 career singles record and a 5-4 career mark in doubles play, while Stratiev has yet to play a varsity match. Friedland is excited about the arrival of freshman Haki Nkrumah (Jamaica, NY/Thomas Edison). Nkrumah, who is also a member of the men's track and field team, is expected to develop into a top singles player for AU. Rounding out the team are freshmen Robert Festa (Fairport, NY/Fairport) and Mike Christofferson (Endwell, NY/Maine-Endwell). While the experienced Vecchione, Dillon, Ventura, Lee and Inthirakoth and the talented newcomer Nkrumah have the inside track on the top six singles positions, Friedland is encouraged by the play of everyone on the roster. "Depth will be a big strength for us this year," Friedland said. "Any of those four guys (Bean, Stratiev, Festa and Christofferson) could fill in at the five or six singles spot at anytime." Friedland feels the Saxons' depth and experience will help them meet the challenges of a strong Empire 8 conference and non-conference schedule. "We suffered two heartbreaking losses last season (4-3 setbacks to St. John Fisher and Hartwick in the Empire 8 Conference tournament) that could have gone either way," Friedland said. "This team has a lot of balance and depth, so if we play to our potential and get off to a good start, we can compete with anyone on our schedule."