

## AU softball team enjoys breakout season

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ALFRED, NY The 2005 Alfred University softball team helped Jaime McLaughlin to her best season in four years as coach, winning a school record-tying 16 games. With only two seniors on the roster, next year's team could be even better. "We've come a long way in the last four years," said McLaughlin. "Winning 16 games was great. We fell short of our goal of making the postseason, which was disappointing, but it's something we can shoot for next year." AU just missed playing in the four-team Empire 8 Conference championship tournament, the winner of which earns an automatic berth in the NCAA Division III playoffs. The Saxons had a 4-8 conference record, good for fifth in the conference standings. AU finished strong, winning its last four games, including a season-ending doubleheader at Hartwick, in which several team and individual records were established. The success of this year's team should carry over into 2006, when eight of 10 starters and nine of 10 letterwinners return. Alfred's success came from a combination of solid hitting, pitching and defense. Team offensive MVP, sophomore third baseman Lauren Mastin (Springwater, NY/Wayland-Cohocton), batted .344 and led the team in most offensive categories, including hits (26), runs (16), triples (a school single-season record-tying five), doubles (11) and RBIs (20). Defensive MVP, junior pitcher Brittany Curran (Alfred, NY/Alfred-Almond), went 12-9 with a solid 2.55 ERA. Her 12 wins tied a school-single season record. Curran, a team captain ended the year setting a host of AU single-season and career mark, including career pitching victories (25), strikeouts in a game (12 vs. Simmons), strikeouts in a season (122, breaking the record of 100 she set last season), strikeouts in a career (255), shutouts in a season (three) and shutouts in a career (five). On offense, Curran had 15 base hits, including the team's only homerun, and drove in four runs. Mastin and Curran weren't alone in contributing to the Saxons' success. The team's two seniors, centerfielder Courtney Briganti (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo) and second baseman Andrea Crandall (Alfred, NY/Alfred-Almond) played well all year, at the plate and on defense, and as captains provided leadership to a relatively young and inexperienced squad. Briganti hit .257 and was the team's best hitter in conference play. She finished with 12 runs, 18 hits and six RBIs while stealing nine bases (second on the team). Crandall played solid defense, finishing with a .958 fielding percentage. Crandall led the team with 10 walks and had eight stolen bases, which helped her score 13 runs. "We had very good chemistry this year, and we owe a lot of that to our two seniors," McLaughlin said. "We will miss them, but fortunately we'll have some excellent players coming back next year." Among the notable returnees will be sophomore catcher Gretchen Weidner (Eden, NY/Eden), junior first baseman Emilie Vicchio (Shaker Heights, OH/Shaker Heights), junior outfielder Adrienne Egglinger (Amityville, NY/Amityville Memorial) and sophomore designated hitter Jen Close (Lodi, NY/South Seneca). Weidner was exceptional behind the plate, finishing with a near-perfect .994 fielding percentage. She batted .282 with nine runs, seven doubles and 12 RBIs (second on the team). Vicchio batted .274 with 14 runs scored and 23 hits (both second on the team) while turning in a .979 fielding percentage. Close, awarded the team's Unsung Hero Award, drove in eight runs, while Egglinger had eight hits and scored four times. A pair of freshmen shortstop Ashley Gelser (Scio, NY/Genesee Valley) and outfielder Quinn Wonderling (Brookville, PA/Brookville) each made an immediate impact as starters. Gelser was a fixture at short all season, playing sound defense (.915 fielding percentage) and performing well at the plate (her 10 RBIs were tied for third on the team). Her 10 stolen bases led the team, with a school single-game record five coming against Simmons. Wonderling, the team Rookie of the Year, saw most of her action in the field. In limited time at the plate, she had five hits, three RBIs and scored twice. A pair of freshmen, pitcher Amanda McMinn (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway) and catcher Diane Rumbold (Simsbury, CT/Simsbury), and junior outfielder Catherine Rieck (Walworth, NY/Gananda) were role players this year and should compete for more playing time in 2006. McMinn saw action in three games and went 1-2 with a double. She will be counted on to provide depth on the mound next season. Rumbold played in four games behind the plate and had one hit in three at-bats. Rieck played in eight games, starting four. McLaughlin said her biggest priority for next season is adding pitching depth. McMinn, a lefty, saw no action on the mound this season and will need to gain experience in the fall and early next year. McLaughlin said she will recruit new talent to join Curran and McMinn in the rotation. Replacing Crandall and Briganti won't be easy, but McLaughlin has plenty of veterans returning. Topping this season's victory total and earning a spot in the conference tournament is an attainable goal. "We have a ton of experience coming back. We just need to add a few people to the mix," McLaughlin said. "We have the talent, and with two captains returning (Curran and Vicchio), we have the leadership."