

## **Youth movement: AU softball team welcomes 18 new players, 15 of them freshmen**

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ALFRED, NY Alfred University will field one of the youngest softball teams in the program's history in 2007, as head coach Gino Olivieri welcomes 18 new players, all but three of them freshmen. While the roster will be short on experience only one player returns from last year's squad, which finished 10-22 and earned Alfred's first-ever trip to the Empire 8 Conference championships Olivieri has high expectations for the Lady Saxons. "We made the Empire 8 playoffs last year," said Olivieri. "As a team, we've set our goals much higher this year. We want to win the conference and go to the NCAAs. These girls want to win now." Olivieri is encouraged by the depth of this year's team, and the talent of his players. The Lady Saxons played well in the fall, he said, and have really come together as a team. "I recruited so many young players to turn this program around," he said. "It will take a lot of hard work, but they're communicating well with each other and they realize our goal is to win." This year's roster is the largest and deepest ever at AU. In past years, injuries have derailed the team's success, as has a lack of depth, particularly on the pitching mound. This year, that won't be the case. "It's great being two-deep at every position. Anyone can start at any position at any time," Olivieri commented. "We have players who can contribute to any style of play. There's lots of speed and power on this team and our pitching will be a strength." The team's youth may be deceptive. Most every player on the team has extensive travel ball experience - Olivieri is familiar with many from his years as a Rochester-area travel ball coach and most played on successful high school programs. On offense, the Lady Saxons will rely on power, contact, speed and smart baserunning. Freshman utility player Jordan Siefer (Sylvania, OH/Sylvania Southview), freshman outfielder Jessica Figallo (Ridgewood, NJ/Ridgewood), and freshman catcher Lauren Peterson (Abingdon, MD/Harford Tech) each provide power to the AU lineup. Siefer's versatility will allow her to play third base, second base, catcher and the outfield. Figallo, a team captain, is solid both at the plate and in the outfield. Peterson, swings a powerful bat and will split time behind the plate with sophomore catcher and team captain Nicole Messura (Albion, NY/Albion), the lone returnee from last season. Another captain, freshman Karen Folts (Penn Yan, NY/Penn Yan), is a solid defensive shortstop and a disciplined contact hitter. Freshman rightfielder Shannon Mather (Endicott, NY/Union-Endicott) can hit with power, slap or bunt from the left side. Adding speed to the lineup are freshman second baseman Caitlin Bangs (Ithaca, NY/Ithaca) and junior second baseman Satomi Tomizawa (Fukushima, Japan/Fulton-Montgomery CC). Both are talented baserunners who will be counted on to steal bases and score runs while playing solid defense. Freshman first baseman Emma Walsh (Lancaster, NY/Mt. St. Mary's), freshman outfielder Amanda Knight (Bel Air, MD/C. Milton Wright), freshman Rachele Walsh (Corning, NY/Corning East), freshman outfielder Mikki Senkow (Elmira Heights, NY/Thomas Edison), freshman third baseman Danielle McMichael (Hornell, NY/Alfred-Almond), senior Christon Forsyth (Harpersville, NY/Harpersville), and freshman catcher Brandi Pendergast (Phoenix, NY/Phoenix) are solid contact hitters who will be able to provide depth on offense and defense. Pitching will be impacted greatest by the increased depth in the AU lineup. For several years, a thin lineup or injuries left the Lady Saxons with a pitching staff of one. Brittany Curran, a 2006 graduate and a graduate assistant coach on this year's team, made nearly 80 starts in her four-year career. Olivieri has four pitchers on his roster this year. "It's great having that kind of pitching depth," Olivieri said. "We have four pitchers who can start any time and they showed they can go seven innings or come in and throw an inning in a save situation. They're all great fielders and they can hit and play another position." Junior Amanda Muncy (Redding, CA/Enterprise), a transfer from Tallahassee (FL) Junior College, and freshman Jesika LeBarron (Campbell, NY/Corning West), Holly Seidewand (Webster, NY/Webster Thomas) and Ilana Price (Wilton, CT/Brien McMahon) will all see time on the mound. In addition to being solid pitchers, Muncy (third base), LeBarron (shortstop) Seidewand (outfield) and Price (first base) can play the field and will provide pop on offense. With increased depth on offense and defense, particularly on the pitching mound, Olivieri's Saxons are poised to return to the Empire 8 championships and challenge for a conference crown. The winner of the conference tournament is awarded an automatic berth to the NCAA Division III championships. Olivieri expects his young team will improve as it gains experience. He said improved defense (the 2006 team had a .918 fielding percentage), smart base running and patience at the plate will be key, especially in close games. "It's a different game in college. We're a young team, and we'll make mistakes. But these girls want to learn and I don't see us making the same mistakes twice," he said. "It's going to be fun." Alfred opens its 2007 season with a March 3-10 trip to Fort Myers, FL, where the Lady Saxons will play 14 games before returning home to prepare for their regular season opening doubleheader March 29 against visiting Pitt-Bradford. Alfred plays its Empire 8

Conference opener April 4, with a doubleheader at home against Elmira.