

AU men's basketball team exceeds expectations

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ALFRED, NY Picked in preseason polls to place seventh of eight teams in the Empire 8 Conference, the AU men's basketball team exceeded most everyone's expectations by compiling an 8-6 conference mark, good for a fourth-place tie. While the Saxons didn't achieve their goal of making the four-team conference championship tournament (tiebreakers awarded RIT the fourth spot), Alfred showed it was a force to be reckoned with in the Empire 8 and perhaps laid the groundwork for a run to the team's first-ever conference tournament berth. Alfred notched some impressive wins, including a home victory over eventual conference champ and NCAA participant St. John Fisher, as well as wins at RIT and at home to conference power Utica. The Saxons' three seniors center Dillon Stein (North Huntingdon, PA/Norwin), forward Ryan Clemenson (Ovid, NY/South Seneca) and guard Robby McCarter (Wooster, OH/Wooster) played well all year and demonstrated leadership head coach Jay Murphy hopes will rub off on the youngsters who will return in 2007-08. Stein wrapped up a stellar career in which he was named a conference all-star all four years, the only time that's happened in the eight-year history of the conference. The 2003-04 Empire 8 Rookie of the Year earned honorable mention from the conference this year after averaging 12.6 points and 5.8 rebounds. He finished his career with 1,296 points and 683 rebounds, and is one of only three players at AU to eclipse 1,200 career points and 650 career rebounds. Clemenson (Alfred's selection for Empire 8 Sportsman of the Year) averaged 9.3 points and 4.8 boards while playing his usual tough defense. McCarter was AU's top scorer, with 15.1 points per game, and was an Empire 8 Second Team all-star. He shot 88.1 percent from the line and ended his career shooting 84.3 percent on foul shots (both new school records). The cupboard won't be bare for Murphy next season, thanks to the immediate contributions of a pair of freshmen: forward Pat Smithgall (Perry, NY/Perry) and guard Jared Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland). Smithgall averaged 9.5 rebounds per game to go with 6.8 points per game. He ranked first in rebounding among all Division III freshmen in the country and only two players in all divisions averaged more rebounds than Smithgall. His 26 rebounds in a Nov. 21 win over Hilbert was the most for a single game in all of college basketball this year, regardless of division. He also became the first freshman to ever lead the Empire 8 in rebounding. Patt averaged 5.7 points per game and is poised to take over for McCarter at the point. Jared Patt's older brother, shooting guard Garlen Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland) will be the team's most veteran player next year. A solid outside shooter, he averaged 6.2 points, 2.8 rebounds and 2.1 assists. Other key returnees include junior forward Jaime Waite (Elmira, NY/Notre Dame), sophomore shooting guard Carl Embury (Perry, NY/Perry) and freshman guard Jon Maroney (Lockport, NY/Lockport). Waite, a junior college transfer, averaged 2.8 points and 1.7 boards, numbers that should go up with more playing time next season. Embury averaged 3.5 points and 2.3 rebounds and Maroney 2.7 points and 1.2 boards. Also set to return are sophomore guard Joel Bigelow (Ilion, NY/Ilion), freshman guards Matt Johnson (Delanson, NY/Duanesburg), Chas Best (Rochester, NY/Franklin), Josh Infante (New York, NY/Economics and Finance) and Nick Barton (South Glens Falls, NY/South Glens Falls, freshmen forward James Simermeyer (East Norwich, NY/Long Island Lutheran) and junior guard-forward Jared Hyatt (Newark, NY/Newark).