

Youthful AU men's soccer team looks to improve on 2007

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ALFRED, NY If the men's soccer team is to improve on its 4-12-1 record from last year (0-7-0 Empire 8) and compete for a conference title, it will have to do so with a very young and inexperienced squad. Fourteen freshman and five sophomores help make up the roster. By contrast there are only three seniors and two juniors. Despite the youth, head coach Scott Miller is optimistic as he prepares for his fifth season at the Saxons' helm. The Saxons will need to improve their scoring from a year ago, when the team netted a total of 20 goals to offset the performance by the defense, which held opponents to 35 goals (just over two per game). Because this year's team is so young as many as six freshmen could be on the field at a time Miller will stress defense, especially early in the season, as his youngsters gain experience. "We'll have to play a little more defensive this year, at least early on," he said. "But with the players we have, we'll be able to generate some quick counter-attacks. We'll start out conservative, but as we gain experience I expect we'll be able to handle the ball better going forward. Miller is optimistic about the play of his forwards, who are exceptionally quick. Freshman Cory Hill (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy) and junior Tom Honan (Ridgewood, NJ/Ridgewood) will be counted on to generate scoring chances up front. Freshman Seth Gordon (Albuquerque, NM/Sandia) and sophomore Matt Ricci (Greenville, NY/Greenville), who will also play midfield, will contribute at forward and be counted on to create chances. The midfield is deep, and possesses a good mix of experience and youth. Senior Adam Nudd (Bath, NY/Haverling), the top returning scorer (three goals in 2007) and sophomore Nick Schneider (Liverpool, NY/Liverpool) will anchor the center of the midfield. Both are solid shooters from distance who play soundly on both ends of the field. Sophomore midfielder Mark Nesbitt (Nunda, NY/Keshequa) and freshman Anthoni Reyes (Ilion, NY/Ilion) will see time on the wings. Freshman Michael Fairman (Brooklyn, NY/HPHS) will also be counted on to contribute offensively from the midfield, while sophomore Neill Bower (Trumansburg, NY/C.O. Dickerson) and freshmen Stephen Barton (Dansville, NY/Dansville), Bradley Willis (Honeoye, NY/Honeoye), Andrew Dean (Aurora, NY/Southern Cayuga), Eric Lavelle (Eden, NY/Eden) and Benjamin Olson (Dansville, NY/Dansville) provide depth. Defense, long a strength of the Saxons, will be tested this year, as no starters return. Sophomore Kevin Morgan (Budd Lake, NJ/Mt. Olive), a midfielder a year ago, will anchor the defense at center-back. Miller said Morgan is a strong player on the ball who will have opportunities to initiate the offense and move forward. Senior Brian Adams (Horseheads, NY/Horseheads), another veteran midfielder, will also play in the back this year, likely on the outside. Junior Mickey Tomik (Salt Point, NY/FDR), a two-year letterwinner, and freshman Ailean Bennett (The Bronx, NY/Harry S. Truman) will see time at defense, as will senior Liam Glover (Savona, NY/Haverling). Freshman Nathan Kucko (Binghamton, NY/Chenango Forks) and James Chrabaszcz (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy) add depth to the defense. "I'm really excited about this group of defenders," Miller said. "It's important that they communicate with each other." Two freshmen will compete for the starting goalkeeper's job: Elliot Thorpe (Highlands Ranch, CO/Thunder Ridge) and Christopher Desouza (Monmouth Junction, NJ/South Brunswick). "Both are very experienced goalies at the high school level," Miller said. "Both are very vocal and are really pushing each other." As Miller looks forward to the season, with hopes of leading the Saxons to a berth in the Empire 8 championship tournament, he sees a young group that has the talent to improve greatly as the season progresses. "In order for us to be successful, we'll have to play more like a team than our opponents," Miller said. "With our youth, we need a total team effort, because right now we don't have the standout individual talent that some of our opponents have." "This is one of the more coachable groups I've had," he continued. "While they're young, I see a lot of potential. They're enthusiastic and willing to work hard and stick to our plan."