

## Offense is key as AU football team looks to improve on 2000 campaign

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ALFRED Facing an upgraded schedule in 2000 that included Division III powers Union and Ithaca, in addition to holdovers Hobart, Hartwick and Carnegie Mellon, the Alfred University football team lost more than its share of close games. This season, with an equally challenging schedule, head coach Dave Murray won't be satisfied to simply compete. He wants the close games to go in the win column. "We know our program can play with the better teams in the country," Murray said, noting close losses to NCAA tournament participant Hobart and perennial power Ithaca. "Rather than being competitive, we want to win our share of those games." To be successful against the quality teams, Murray said the team's priority will be in establishing an effective running game. That will be especially important early in the season, as a defense that lost seven starters from a year ago works to get established. Murray feels the offense may be the best he's had in his four years as head coach. All 11 players who were starting at year's end in 2000 are back, including an offensive line Murray says is the best he's had. "The key to our offense is the line," Murray said. The projected starters average close to 290 pounds and are solid run and pass blockers, each with at least two years of extensive playing time. The Saxons have a solid running game, led by junior tailback Jesse Raynor (Weedsport/Weedsport), plus some promising freshmen recruits. Senior quarterback Todd Zandrowicz (East Aurora/East Aurora) is a four-year starter and the top three receivers are all multiple letterwinners. "We have some great experience behind the line." Establishing the offense early in the season, particularly the running game, is key, Murray stressed. "I think our offense may have to carry our team initially because there are so many starters on defense we have to replace. We'll need to control the clock and keep the defense off the field." Indeed, graduation took its toll on the Saxon defense. The top four linebackers and three of four starting defensive backs are gone. The good news is the return of five of the top six linemen (three starters), including standout senior tackle and captain Todd Strong (Deposit/Deposit). "Our priority is to stop the run. Fortunately, with all the losses to graduation we've had, the line remained intact," Murray said. "We have some holes to fill. We're going to be young, but we just have to count on them to hold their own early and establish themselves. The big key is to avoid giving up the big play and force turnovers." Here's a glance at the 2001 Saxons: OFFENSE: With all but one starter returning (four-year starting guard Wes Choy graduated in May) the offense should be the Saxons' strongest unit. Zandrowicz begins his senior season with 3,741 passing yards and has an outside shot at eclipsing Glenn Law's career passing mark of 5,712 yards. Zandrowicz is an adept scrambler who has rushed for 384 yards and eight TDs in his career. Backing up Zandrowicz will be junior Jeff Merryman (Philadelphia, PA/Holy Ghost) and a trio of freshmen, Ron Duliba (Forestville/Forestville), Frank Sansotta (Mamaroneck/Mamaroneck) and Shawn Henry (Dansville/Dansville). Zandrowicz will be throwing to a pair of experienced senior wideouts. Nick Freeman (Bolivar/Cuba-Rushford) emerged as a big-play threat last season, averaging 17.7 yards on 23 catches. Senior Brian Keenan (Canandaigua/Canandaigua), the team's third receiver the last two years, will see increased playing time this season. Sophomore Nick Coleman (Waverly/Waverly) will also be competing for time at wide receiver. Junior Mark Pierce (Utica/New Hartford), a solid blocker, will start at tight end. Others who should see time at tight end include sophomore Pat Bell (Bow, NH/Bow) and freshman Kalen Fitch (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway). Raynor will be expected to carry the brunt of the offensive load this season. The Saxons' most well-rounded player on offense, Raynor enjoyed a breakout season in 2000, running for 997 yards and 11 scores and catching a team-high 37 passes for 302 yards and two touchdowns. Against Canisius in Game 9, he set new school single-game records for rushing yards with 265 and touchdowns with five. He finished the year strong, with 100-plus yards rushing in each of the last five games. Top backups at tailback include a pair of outstanding freshmen, Brenton Brady (Rochester/Marshall) and Anthony Pollizi (Hornell/Hornell), and sophomore Corey Raner (Locke/Moravia). Senior fullback Chuck Fortuna (Allegany/Allegany-Limestone) blocks well and last season finished third on the team in rushing and fourth in receiving. He will be backed up by sophomore John Chaney (Carthage/Carthage). The offensive line is solid, with four returning starters, including two captains senior tackle Dan Herrling (Weedsport/Weedsport) and senior center Erik Werner (Warren, PA/Warren). Junior guard Steve Price (Syracuse/Henninger) and junior tackle Russell Myers (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway) also return from a line that helped the Saxons to nearly 200 yards per game on the ground in 2000. Sophomore Sean Gollnitz (Fredonia/Fredonia), who started the last half of 2000, will start at guard this season. Junior Larry Rossi (Hyde Park/F.D. Roosevelt) and senior Jared Smith (Bolivar/Bolivar-Richburg) will be key backups. DEFENSE: The Saxons' defense suffered several key losses to graduation, none more notable than Brian Keefer, a three-year starter at strong

safety who left AU ranked fourth all-time in tackles. Murray enters 2001 having to replace three starting defensive backs and the top four linebackers. The good news is that all but one of the starting linemen from last season return. Strong, a powerful run stopper who has a knack for creating havoc in the opponent's backfield, leads the defensive line. In two seasons as a starter, Strong has 125 tackles, 20 for losses, and 3.5 sacks. He is joined on the line by incumbent starters, junior ends Nick Luther (Westfield/Westfield) and Dan Raynor (Bemus Point/Maple Grove) and junior tackle Pete Gaydon (Muncy, PA/Muncy). Junior Dave Murello (Clifton Park/Shenendehowa) and sophomore Doug Mueller (Bainbridge/Bainbridge-Guilford) were solid backups last season who should see substantial playing time. Also competing for time on the defensive line are sophomores Jeremy Batt (Gowanda/Gowanda) and Sean Malley (Syracuse/Westhill) and freshmen Louie Pereira (Rochester/Greece Athena) and Kaleb Fitch (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway). The linebacking position will be AU's most inexperienced this year. Murray will count on junior Will Till (Forestville/Forestville), sophomore Nick Hawryschuk (Seneca Falls/Mynderse Academy) and senior Jon Baulsir (Hudson Falls/Hudson Falls) to fill the void left by the graduation the top four linebackers from 2000. Others competing for time at linebacker include sophomores Chris Ware (Orchard Park/St. Francis), Ryan DiDomenico (Jamestown/Jamestown) and Erich Ely (Jordan/Jordan-Albridge) and freshman Joe Pereira (Rochester/Greece Athena). Murray will have a hard time replacing Keefer, as well as cornerbacks Joe Uderitz and Craig Spangler, but he is encouraged by the return of senior free safety Nick Selig (Hamburg/Hamburg), a team captain this year who had 34 tackles and a pair of interceptions in 2000. Others competing for starting jobs in the secondary include juniors Dan Selig (Hamburg/Hamburg), who was the nickelback last year before suffering a season-ending knee injury in the second week, and Gabe Bouthillier (Bridgeport/Cicero-North Syracuse), sophomores Vinny Adamo (Fayetteville/Fayetteville-Manlius), Colin Murphy (Manchester, NH/Central), Ryan Sutphen (Glens Falls/Glens Falls) and Drew Zaborowski (Bowmansville/Lancaster) and freshmen Kiel Liddell (Bemus Point/Maple Grove) and Sean Wheeler (Bath/Bath-Haverling). SPECIAL TEAMS: For the first time in four years, the Saxons will have a new placekicker. Jesse Raynor enters as the favorite to take over for four-year starter Ryan Rambacher. Raynor has handled kickoff duties for each of the past two seasons. Others competing for the kicker's job include a pair of freshmen, Chris Brenna (Ithaca/Ithaca) and Alastair-Ian Means (Melrose/Melrose). Zandrowicz, for the third straight year, will handle punting duties. Raynor, Brady and Pollizi are expected to share kickoff return duties. Raynor averaged 18.3 yards per return last year and 23.1 the season before.