

AU women's swimming and diving team aims for steady improvement

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ALFRED, NY The Alfred University women's swimming and diving team, small in roster size and inexperienced in comparison to the men's squad, will look to improve throughout the season and ultimately better its ninth-place finish at last year's state championships. "We have a small roster, but despite that I think we have a great group," said fifth-year head coach Brian Striker. "Right now we're focused on obtaining individual and team goals and working on continually improving. We're doing better than last year." The Lady Saxons have some tremendously talented swimmers and divers who will be counted on to perform in the pool and provide guidance to a team that has only four seniors. "We have some bright stars on this team, and some great leaders," Striker said. Senior diver Erin Collins (Owego, NY/Owego) is the most experienced and accomplished member of the team. Alfred's top diver throughout her career, she routinely finished at or near the top of the diving events at dual meets. She was slowed by injury last year, yet finished seventh in 3-meter diving at the New York State Collegiate Athletic Association meet. Striker expects her to rebound and make her mark in the regular season and at states. "She's a great leader and a very hard worker," Striker said. "She was bothered by the injury last year, and we hope she's to the point where she becomes one of the top divers in the state and Empire 8 Conference." Two other seniors counted on to provide leadership while scoring points for AU are Jessica White (Palmyra, NY/Palmyra-Macedon), freestyle, and diver Jamie Wingate (Groton, NY/Lansing). White, who along with sophomore Jessie Caccamo (Ballston Lake, NY/Shenendehowa) was among the team's best distance freestylers last year, placed in the top 20 in the 1,650-yard and 500-yard freestyle events at the state meet. Wingate had a win and seven runner-up finishes in diving events at dual meets in 2005-06. "White has gotten faster every year," Striker said of White, who will swim primarily in middle-distance freestyle events and strengthen relay teams. "Wingate will be invaluable in the experience she provides. She's as competitive as our best swimmers has a chance to score for us at the state meet." Alfred's other senior, Jessica Zekus (Tuscon, AZ/Canyon Del Oro) is a hard-working swimmer, will be counted on to step up her contributions in the backstroke and distance freestyle events. "With our top swimmers in the medley relays gone from last year's team, we'll need swimmers like (Zekus) to fill in," Striker said. A group of six juniors will be counted on heavily, as there are a total of only six from the sophomore and freshmen classes. Perhaps the top junior is Lindsay Scypta (Plymouth, MI/Cranbrook-Kingswood). The team's fastest breastroker and a talented individual medley swimmer, she enjoyed three top-16 finishes at the state meet last spring, including a seventh place in the 200-yard breast. She placed 12th and 15th, respectively, in the 400-yard and 200-yard IM at states. "She's very versatile," Striker said of Scypta. "We'll need her to provide leadership and continue to perform as she has." Other juniors who will be counted on include Kim Covino (Derby, NY/Lake Shore), freestyle, breaststroke; Mary Hodock (Palmyra, NY/Palmyra-Macedon), freestyle; Alyssa Ketchum (Salt Point, NY/FDR), breast, butterfly; and Danielle Zatkowsky (Rochester, NY/Brighton), a newcomer to the team who will provide depth in the distance freestyle events. Caccamo enjoyed a successful freshman campaign and was the team's leading scorer in dual meets while setting new school records in the 1,650-yard and 1,000-yard freestyle races. "She's a very talented athlete," Striker said of Caccamo. "We'll rely heavily on her in individual events and relays. Sophomore Brynja Seagren (Bradford, PA/Bradford) will provide depth to the diving corps and will also swim some freestyle and butterfly events. Two other sophomores, Elizabeth Davis (Castile, NY/Letchworth), butterfly, and Anne Sheehy (Staatsburg, NY/FDR), IM and breaststroke, add depth to the women's squad. A pair of freshmen Meghan Jones (Beaver Falls, NY/Beaver Falls) and Sara Schwartz (Farmington, NY/Victor) will be counted on to contribute right away: Jones primarily in freestyle and Schwartz in the backstroke. Striker said what he's looking for most from the women's team is a solid effort across-the-board effort and steady improvement. "We're kind of in a rebuilding phase," he said. "Right now we're looking for them to work together as a cohesive unit and strive, one meet at a time, to reach their goals. It's a very hard-working group. If they swim well, and swim their best, they'll succeed."