

Enke optimistic AU women's soccer team ready to turn corner

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ALFRED, NY — In the wake of a 2011 season that saw the Alfred University women's soccer team go 4-11-0, head coach Jen Enke sees enough talent and potential in her 2012 squad that she is hopeful the Lady Saxons will take steps toward reaching their goal: a berth in the four-team Empire 8 Conference championship tournament.

Enke is optimistic that the return of several veterans from last year's team AU returns eight of 11 starters, and a former two-year starting midfielder rejoins the team after a one-year absence will help the Saxons reverse a handful of close losses and improve on an 0-7-0 conference record.

"The girls we have are all good, skilled soccer players," Enke said. "We've worked hard on our tactics and have a better idea of what we want to accomplish on the field."

Enke said the team will play a brand of soccer that emphasizes possession, increasing scoring opportunities by keeping the ball on the opponents' end of the field. She feels she has the personnel up front, at midfield and on the back line to accomplish that goal and reverse a 2011 season in which AU was outshot 252-124 and outscored 40-12.

"We'll have a defensive style of play that allows us to win the ball and create scoring chances off our defense," Enke said. "We need to keep the ball, and increase our offensive opportunities. And if we lose it, we need to win it back at the midfield and keep it out of our third of the field."

AU has some talented forwards who will give the Saxons scoring punch. Sophomore Rachael Williams (Penfield, NY/Penfield), an honorable mention Empire 8 all-star, was the team's leading scorer a season ago with 11 points on four goals and three assists (both team highs). "She's a real playmaker," Enke said of Williams, who will see time at midfield as well.

Williams will see time up front with a trio of young forwards in junior Sara Borrhello (Columbia Station, OH/Columbia), sophomore Emily Heslop (Aurora, NY/Southern Cayuga) and freshman Mary Hendee (Almond, NY/Alfred-Almond).

Hendee "is dangerous, with good speed and is tenacious with finding her shot. She's very competitive," Enke said. Borrhello (one goal, one assist in 2011) "has great experience in our system. She's a good athlete with a real nose for the ball." Heslop (14 games, one start last season) and freshman Dana Sass (Caledonia, NY/Caledonia-Mumford) add depth to the forward line.

Alfred possesses a solid midfield, with some solid offensive weapons and skilled defenders. Seniors Tracie McGinnity (Rochester, NY/Gates-Chili) and Devin Fitzgerald (Rochester/Greece Olympia) will start at midfield.

Fitzgerald started all 15 games in 2011 and had a goal and an assist. "She has good ball skills, a very strong leg and experience," Enke said. McGinnity, who did not play last fall, returns after seeing time as a starting midfielder in 2009 and 2010. "She may see time at forward as well. We'll play through her quite a bit because she has an ability to make things happen, find open spaces and make the open pass."

Other players vying for time at midfield are junior Samantha Randall (Homer, NY/Homer), who played in 15 games in 2011; freshman Dawn Torlish (Farmington, NY/Victor); and junior Shealyn McKee (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood), a transfer who played two seasons at Alfred State College. Freshman Daphne Croop (Williamson, NY/Williamson) adds depth to the midfield and can also play defense.

The back line will be anchored by a pair of veteran defenders in junior Martha McGrath (Victor, NY/Victor), an honorable mention E8 pick last year, and senior Gabrielle Rinaldi (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood), a letterwinner each of her three seasons at AU.

McGrath "will anchor our defense. She's a great tactician and is physical strong and fast," Enke said. Rinaldi is "a good leader and a very hard worker."

Sophomore Nicole Lobur (Akron, NY/Akron) started on defense as a freshman and will see extensive time on the back line again this year. "She is strong and fit and has a good foot. We'll look for her to lead our defense as a central defender," Enke commented.

Also competing for time on defense will be freshmen Rachel Winter (Bergen, NY/Byron-Bergen), Emma Graham (Groton, NY/Groton), and Danielle Heyder (Bayport, NY/Bayport-Bluepoint). Sophomore Sarah Evans (Lafayette, NY/Manlius Pebble Hill) and freshman Stacey Arnold (Galway, NY/Galway) add depth to the back line. Freshman Sydney Hamilton (Reston, VA/South Lakes) could see time at forward or defense.

Senior Ashley Frazell (Newton, NJ/Newton) returns as the starting goalkeeper. As a junior who transferred to AU prior to the 2011 season, Frazell saw action in 13 games (12 starts) and posted a 2.45 goals against average and .716 save percentage.

"She's a great shot-stopper and a vocal leader," Enke said of Frazell, who could see time as a defender as well.

Junior Samijo Scheer (Corning, NY/Corning East) will back up Frazell in goal. She transferred to Alfred after a stellar junior college career at Tompkins County Community College, where she was a two-time junior college All-American. "Samijo is a strong keeper who will see some time in goal and on the field as well," Enke said.

Freshmen Roselyn Denne (Pottersville, NY/Bolton) and sophomores Alicia Hanes (Vestal, NY/Vestal) and Brianna Opperman (Erie, PA/Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy) add depth to the goalkeeping position.

Enke said the team's goal is to finish in the top four of the Empire 8 standings and earn a berth in the conference's championship tournament, the winner of which wins an automatic bid to the NCAA championships.

“We’re looking for a winning record and to get into the E8 tournament,” she said. “To do that we need to beat the teams that have handed us close losses last year.”