

## Improved Lady Saxons hope to make mark in conference

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ALFRED, NY In 2008-09, the Alfred University women's basketball team was among the most improved of all teams in Division III. With four of five starters returning, head coach Jay Murphy is confident his team will continue its upward climb and challenge for the program's first-ever berth in the Empire 8 Conference championship tournament. The Lady Saxons certainly have the talent and experience to reach that goal. "We have about two-thirds of our scoring back and we have veteran leadership with five seniors," said Murphy, in his second season coaching the AU women after a 13-year tenure as Alfred's men's coach. "We expect to win games rather than hoping to win games. That 10-game swing has given them that kind of confidence." The "10-game swing" Murphy refers to was an improvement by 10 in the number of wins from two in 2007-08 (2-21 record), to 12 in 2008-09 (12-13). That marked the fourth-best improvement in the nation. With a host of veteran players who've seen meaningful minutes since their freshmen years, and the return from injury of one of the team's top post players, the lady Saxons are poised to improve against this season. Leading the way for AU will be junior point guard Lyndsay Murphy (Almond, NY/Hornell). The coach's daughter, Murphy transferred to AU last season after spending her freshman year at rival St. John Fisher. She led the team in scoring (14.1 ppg) and assists (4.2 per game) and was third in rebounding (4.5 per game) en route to being named the program's first-ever First Team Empire 8 all-star. The coach expects Murphy to continue putting up solid numbers, but also to become more of a team leader. "Lyndsay came in and led by example. She's more vocal this year," the coach said, noting her abilities as a scorer and distributor of the ball. "She's a smart player who knows how to play the game. She has great court vision; if you're open, she's going to find you." Murphy isn't the only talented player in the Lady Saxons' backcourt. Sophomore Christina Jordan (Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, NY/Cornwall) averaged 7.1 points as a freshman, making 43 three-pointers, second on the team behind Murphy's 55, and added 3.1 rebounds per contest. "She's a scorer and she's gotten better with experience," Murphy said of Jordan. "She's a very good perimeter shooter and has worked hard at bringing the ball to the hoop." Senior shooting guard Lisa Button (Troupsburg, NY/Jasper-Troupsburg) and senior three-guard Hannah Meier (Rochester, NY/Greece Odyssey) are three-year letterwinners who will be counted on to provide scoring punch, and sophomore Kasey Kwiecien (Perry, NY/Perry) will back Murphy up on the point. Meier (four rebounds per game; team-best 28 blocks) and Button (2.1 apg) averaged 4.0 and 4.5 points, respectively. "Lisa is a good outside shooter and we want to work to get her open shots," Murphy said. "We need Hannah to consistently get 12 to 15 points, rebound and play good post defense." Kwiecien saw action in 19 games after joining the team after the semester break and logged 19 minutes per contest, posting an assist-to-turnover ratio of better than 2-to-1. Also providing depth at the guard position will be sophomore Molly Sullivan (Fonda, NY/Fonda-Fultonville). Murphy will welcome the return of junior Autumn McLain (Oneida, NY/Oneida). The 5-10 forward missed last season with a knee injury after averaging 4.5 rebounds as a freshman. She improves the team with her rebounding and defensive abilities and will also be counted on to score. "Autumn has good range from 15 feet and is a good post scorer and defender," Murphy commented. "She's very athletic and can get up and down the floor. If we had had her last season, there were three or four more games we would have won based on her rebounding alone." Three senior forwards Libby Meier (Rochester, NY/Greece Odyssey), Danielle Cooper (Reading, PA/Reading) and Alysha Dias (Rochester, NY/Greece Olympia) are three-year letterwinners who will be counted on, with McLain, to control the glass and score and defend in the post. Meier

averaged 3.3 points and 3.6 rebounds; Dias, a 5-11 small forward, averaged 4.8 rebounds (tops among returnees) and 4.7 points; and Cooper, at 5-10, averaged 2.7 points and 2.8 boards. "Libby (5-11) is going to play in the post (power forward and center) for us. She's a great leader and a hard worker who is probably our best post defender," Murphy said. "Alysha contributes in so many ways. She's one of our most athletic players. She can get to the rim, has range from 15 to 16 feet, and will be counted on to guard the opponents' top scorers. (Cooper) has improved her post moves immensely from last year. I expect her to score more around the rim, rebound and play good, solid post defense." A pair of 5-7 freshmen guard-forwards Jamie Perry (Hannibal, NY/Hannibal) and Corissa Fanning (Boukville, NY/Morrisville-Eaton) provides the team added depth. "Jamie is a tough, athletic competitor and Corissa is a good rebounder," Murphy said. Playing well in all phases of the game is paramount to the Saxons' success. "Offensively, we want to take better advantage of our transition opportunities so we can get some easy layups and open looks from three-point range," Murphy said. "And we understand we need to play good defense and rebound the ball in order to win." Murphy said the team, especially the veteran players, are eager to finish with a better record than a year ago and place in the top four in the Empire 8 Conference standings. The top four teams play in the Empire 8 championship tournament, the winner of which earns the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Division III tournament. "We have good chemistry, and each girl supports the others and knows the team comes first. The five seniors really want to get into the Empire 8 playoffs. It would be a nice feather in their caps," Murphy said. "We won't be surprising anyone this year, so we have to be ready to compete every night. If they work hard every night, it will go a long way toward realizing our goals."