

Saxons take three top all-conference football honors; 13 players awarded

11/18/10



ALFRED, NY Three members of the Alfred University football team were awarded top honors by the Empire 8 Conference, with 13 different players recognized as conference all-stars. The Empire 8 announced its all-conference teams chosen by Empire 8 coaches Thursday afternoon. Freshman tailback Austin Dwyer (Hornell, NY/Hornell) was named Rookie of the Year; junior outside linebacker Nick Clark (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood) was named Defensive Player of the Year; and Dave Murray was named Coach of the Year. All three were chosen unanimously. Six other Saxons join Dwyer and Clark as First Team Selections. They are senior wide receiver Ryan Thon (Victor, NY/Victor), senior left tackle Zach Morgan (Homer, NY/Homer), senior center Jeff VanDewalker (Cicero, NY/Cicero-North Syracuse), sophomore defensive tackle Mike Raplee (Dundee, NY/Dundee), junior cornerback Roland O'Brien (Hoosick Falls, NY/Hoosick Falls), and junior placekicker Eric Rockwood (Allegany, NY/Allegany-Limestone). Five AU players earned Second Team recognition: junior quarterback Tom Secky (Bemus Point, NY/Maple Grove), senior tight end D.J. Loughlin-Pope (Corning, NY/Corning East), sophomore left guard Justin Mesi (Orchard Park, NY/Orchard Park), senior linebacker Chad Pieri (LeRoy, NY/Caledonia-Mumford), and sophomore punter Matt Girolmo (Livonia, NY/Livonia). Dwyer who also earned First Team honors as an all-purpose runner and Second Team honors as a return man leads the Empire 8 in rushing yards (1,147), rushing yards per game (114.7), all-purpose yards per game (173.0) and averaged 21.6 yards on kick returns and 9.5 yards on punt returns. Heading into Saturday's first-round NCAA playoff game against visiting Maritime College, Dwyer ranks 13th in the country in all-purpose yards and 26th in rushing yards. Dwyer, who finished with six rushing TDs and 30 catches for 207 yards, performed especially well in Empire 8 play, averaging 146.2 yards rushing in five contests. He ran for 603 yards against St. John Fisher, Ithaca and Springfield, with a career-high 273 yards coming against Ithaca. Clark earned all-conference recognition for the third time in three seasons; he was a Second Team pick as a freshman in 2008 and a First Team all-star last year. He leads the team in tackles with 80 (42 solo) and has two sacks, 7.5 tackles for loss, a fumble recovery and a pair of interceptions. The Saxons' short-yardage running back, he leads the team in rushing touchdowns with seven. Thon a first-time conference all-star has team-highs in catches (59), receiving yards (759) and TD catches (11). His 11 touchdown receptions rank second in a single-season in AU history and his four in a win against Hartwick set a new school single-game record. Morgan is a conference all-star for a third straight year. He earned honorable mention in 2008 and First Team recognition last year, both times as a right tackle. VanDewalker, a three-year starter at center and a team captain this year, is a first-time selection. He and Morgan played on a line that helped the Saxons produce 403.2 yards of offense (171.0 rushing, 232.2 passing) and allowed only 11 sacks on the year. Raplee earned all-conference honors for a second time; he was an honorable mention pick as a freshman last season. Raplee was second on the team, in tackles with 69 (26 solo) and had a team-best 14 tackles for loss. His five sacks ranked second on the team and he had one fumble recovery. O'Brien, a first-time conference all-star, led the Empire 8 in interceptions with seven, and at one point had six straight games with an interception. He had 31 tackles (23 solo) and returned an interception for a touchdown to open the scoring in a key conference victory over St. John Fisher. Rockwood, a Second team pick in 2009, earned conference honors for a second time. He converted 44 of 45 extra point attempts (his 50 straight PATs made from the end of the 2008 season to this year's opener is a school records) and four of five field goal tries. Secky was named a conference all-star for the third time in his career. The 2008 Empire 8 Rookie of the

Year earned honorable mention as a freshman and First Team honors last year. He has completed 185 of 297 passes for 2,253 yards (fifth most in a single-season at AU) with 21 touchdowns and 13 interceptions. Heading into Saturday's game, he has 7,063 career passing yards (544 off the AU record) and 74 career TD passes (six off the AU mark). Loughlin-Pope, an outstanding blocking tight end, earned Empire 8 honors for a third time. He was a Second Team pick in 2008 and earned honorable mention last season. He has caught nine passes for 116 yards and three touchdowns this year. Mesi earns all-conference recognition in his first season as a starter. Playing between Morgan and VanDewalker, he played on a line that helped the Saxons produce 403.2 yards of offense (171.0 rushing, 232.2 passing) and allowed only 11 sacks on the year. Pieri will finish his AU career having earned all-conference honors all four years. He earned Second Team honors as a freshman, junior and senior and First Team honors as a sophomore. Pieri is third on the team in tackles with 59 (25 solo) and has 7.5 tackles for loss, one-half sack and six pass breakups. Girolmo, in his first season as a starter, averaged 32.1 yards per punt (long of 57) and landed seven kicks inside the opponents' 20-yard line. Murray earned Empire 8 Coach of the Year honors for the third time (the first was in 2005; he was also honored last year). He brings the Saxons (8-2, 5-0 Empire 8) to the NCAA tournament for the second straight year and only the third time in school history; the Saxons first made the NCAAs in 1981. Murray guided the Saxons to a share of the Empire 8 regular season title last season and this year his team won its first-ever outright conference crown. He has an 84-48-0 record in has a 76-46-0 record in 13 seasons at AU. Dwyer is the fourth AU player to earn Empire 8 Rookie of the Year honors. The others are strong safety Aaron Meyers (2003), wide receiver Jared Manzer (2006) and Secky (2008). Clark is Alfred's first-ever Defensive Player of the Year, although linebacker Brenton Brady was named Player of the Year in 2004, before the conference implemented a Defensive Player of the Year award. Alfred is the sixth seed in the NCAA East Region and plays host to third-seeded Maritime College (10-0) in a first-round game Saturday, Nov. 20, at noon at Merrill Field. Despite being a lower seed, AU is hosting because Maritime is ineligible to host.