

AU swimming and diving teams look to exceed last year's accomplishments

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ALFRED --The Alfred University swimming and diving teams have set their goals high for the 2003-04 season. The men are aiming to exceed their accomplishments of a season ago, when the Saxons took home the school's first-ever state and Empire 8 conference titles. The women will look to build on a solid year in which they placed third and second, respectively, in the state and conference meets. "We do have lofty goals, but we have the student-athletes to achieve them," said second-year head coach Brian Striker, who as a rookie coach in 2002-03 was named men's Coach of the Year for both the state and conference. "We want to become one of the top (Division III) programs in the country." The men's team is poised to make its mark, both at the state and national levels. It is a veteran squad that returns six seniors, each of whom placed in at least one event in last year's state championships. They include tri-captains Mike Dube (Williamsburg/Lafayette), Jack Stover III (Naples/Naples) and Matt Weems (Arlington, VA/Washington Lee). Dube was third in the 200 backstroke at the state meet and won an Empire 8 title in the same event. Stover placed at the state meet in the 1650 freestyle (fourth) and 500 freestyle (seventh) and Weems placed fourth in the 200 freestyle and sixth in the 100 and 500 freestyle events at the state meet. Seniors Bill Brown (Chaffee/Pioneer), Brendan Miller (Auburn/Auburn) and Matt McNamara (Livonia/Livonia) also placed at the state meet and will be counted on to contribute even more this season. All six seniors are integral parts of relay teams that should be stronger this season. And each will be counted on to replace the leadership lost when last year's seniors graduated. "We lost six really good seniors from last season and each was a big part of the team," Striker said. "We'll need these seniors to really pick it up this year." A host of underclassmen will provide depth and experience. Junior Kevin Martin (Conesus/Livonia) earned All-American honors as a freshman and hopes to attain that status again this season. He was Alfred's lone state champion last year with a win in the 100 butterfly. He is also a huge part of the Saxons' relay effort. Striker is looking for big things from junior Nick Bradley (King Ferry/Southern Cayuga) and sophomores Alex Crowell (Wayland, MA/Wayland) and Brian Gotham (Syracuse/Nottingham). Crowell, a freestyler, swam on teams that placed second and fourth, respectively, in the 200 freestyle and 400 freestyle relays at last year's state meet. Gotham and Crowell were third and sixth, respectively, in the 100 breaststroke at states. Striker will count on juniors Peter Wachtel (Altamont/Guilderland) and Patrick O'Neill (Warren, PA/Warren) to get the Saxons points in diving events. Wachtel had two dual meet victories and the two combined for 14 top-three finishes in dual meets last season. Further bolstering the team will be a strong freshman class that includes the coach's younger brother, Brandon Striker (Caledonia/York) and Larry Toebe III (Merrimack, NH/Trinity). Brandon Striker will swim freestyle and butterfly, while Toebe will compete primarily in the individual medley and breaststroke events. Striker expects Trevor Covey (Alburt, VT), Mike Bradley (King Ferry/Southern Cayuga) and John Czornig (Scipio Center/Southern Cayuga) to improve as they gain experience. Others counted on to contribute to the Saxons' effort will be juniors Justin Kratz (Lansdale, PA/North Penn) (breaststroke) and Mike Huffman (Ithaca/Lansing) (freestyle); and sophomores Jay Ferrio (Allentown, PA, Emmaus) in the backstroke and freestyle, Glenn Jewell (Ithaca/Ithaca) and Ross Munson (Groton/Lansing) in distance events, and Ian Smith (Baldwinsville/C.W. Baker) in freestyle and butterfly. Striker is pleased with the mix of veterans and newcomers and is pleased by the way the lineup has filled out. "Our strengths are our depth and our senior class," he said. "You won't find a much better (senior) class on any team." Now, the Saxons will set upon the task of realizing goals that will exceed even last year's run to a state title. "We want to repeat as state and conference champions," Striker said. "But our biggest goals are to get as many swimmers as we can to the NCAA championships and finish in the top 10 as a team. I know we'll work very hard to get it done. The makeup of the women's team is almost the exact opposite of the men's. Several top performers graduated last year. Only two seniors, Sara Thompson (Batavia/Batavia) and Becca Coppola (Takoma Park, MD/Montgomery Blair) grace this year's roster. Thompson, who earned Honorable Mention All-American status as a sophomore, will try to return to the NCAA championships in this, her senior year. The holder of three individual school records and a member of relay teams that hold four other school marks, Thompson was Alfred's top performer at last year's state meet, winning the 100 breaststroke, placing second in the 200 breaststroke and third in the 200 individual medley. Coppola set a new school record in the 200 butterfly and is also part of the 800 freestyle relay team that established a school mark in 2002. She placed fifth in the 1650 freestyle at states last year. Thompson and Coppola, along with fellow tri-captain, junior Lacy Clifford (Oil City, PA/Oil City) will be counted on to provide guidance and leadership to a team made up mostly of sophomores and freshmen. "This is a totally new team," Striker said. "We're inexperienced, but we have some good

leaders." Clifford placed in two events at state meet, finishing fifth in the 200 backstroke and seventh in the 100 butterfly. She placed in the top-three in 15 dual meet races last season. Other veterans who bring experience to the Lady Saxons include juniors Lauren McCormack (Norwich/Norwich) (breaststroke/freestyle) and Elisabeth Meissner (Churchville/Byron-Bergen) (freestyle/breaststroke); sophomores Bonnie McDermott (Grand Island/Mt. St. Mary) (breaststroke; one win and seven top-three finishes in dual meets last season), Rachel Saroka (Groton/Groton) (individual medley; 11 top three dual-meet finishes) and Tara Mungro (Rochester/Wilson Magnet) (freestyle and breaststroke). "I'm looking for our sophomores, with a year under their belts, to really improve. I can see they've made great strides," Striker commented. Striker expects the diving corps to contribute much to the AU women's effort. Sophomore Kathleen Wittich (Pine Bush/Pine Bush) finished in the top three in 13 dual-meet events last year. She'll be joined by a pair of talented freshmen in Erin Collins (Owego/Owego) and Jamie Wingate (Groton/Lansing). "We're looking for our divers to do really well," Striker said. "They're going to be a big part of our team." A solid group of freshman will be expected to contribute immediately. They include Zara Racz (Morristown, NJ/Morristown), a freestyler; Jessica White (Palmyra/Palmyra-Macedon), freestyle, distance; Elizabeth Davis (Castile/Letchworth), freestyle; Genevieve Foote (New Windsor/Miss Porter's School), freestyle; Brianna Paquette (West Burke, VT/St. Johnsbury), freestyle; and Jessica Zekus (Tuscon, AZ), freestyle. Striker said the women's team's goal, like the men's, is to build on last year's success. "We want to place in the top three or higher at the states and improve on our dual meet record (4-5 last year). And Sara (Thompson) really wants to get back to nationals," he said. "We're young, but we'll work hard to improve. We really lost a lot from our relay teams last year, but we think we have some swimmers we can plug in and do well."