

AU men's soccer team enjoys huge success, sets goals high for 2001

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ALFRED The Alfred University men's soccer team kicked off the new millennium with a record-breaking season. The 2000 campaign saw the Saxons win four more games than the previous year, break the AU record for most goals in a single season, place three players on the Empire Eight all-conference team, move up to 9th in the regional rankings, and fall just one win shy of receiving an invitation to postseason play. Still, Head Coach Ken Hassler was pleased with the outcome of the season and the remarkable play of the entire Saxon team. "I'm extremely impressed and proud of the way the players developed as individuals and as a team," stated Hassler. "This year was very exciting for us. The team possessed an excellent attitude and a real desire to improve. It showed in the intensity and quality of our training every day and in their close friendships and team unity." The Saxons finished the 2000 season with an overall record of 11-5-1, and an Empire Eight Conference record of 3-3. After a season opening overtime loss, Alfred dominated their opponents, going undefeated in 12 of their next 14 matches. During one two-week stretch Hassler's squad won six games in all. That streak also saw the Saxon defense allow only three goals, while sophomore goalkeeper Kevin Ball (Wheeling, WV/Linsly School) tallied three straight shutouts. Hassler attributes the Saxons' level of success to a universally accepted willingness to work and play within the team concept. "This was a highly competitive, highly intelligent team," Hassler said. "The team is made up of players with great skill, excellent fitness, and an ability to read the game. Their talent allowed us to make the tactical changes necessary to win over and over again." Perhaps what was most unbelievable about the Saxons' 2000 campaign was the ECAC Tournament selection committee's decision not to invite Alfred University into the playoffs. Despite posting an impressive overall record, the Saxons were denied the chance to shine in postseason play. Hassler believes the 2000 Saxons were a quality team that deserved to be present in the ECAC tournament. Despite the obvious disappointment, Hassler refuses to lose focus and continues to remain positive in every situation. "Not receiving a tournament bid will act as a motivator for us. This team is hungry for a title and has already started to train for next year. We'll be ready!" stated Hassler. One of the Saxon's strengths this year was their players' ability to continually step it up a notch when most needed. Hassler found the contribution of his bench to be indispensable. "Each player trained hard everyday to make themselves better and the team more competitive. Other years these players would have earned spots in the first eleven, but this year they sacrificed playing time for the good of the team," Hassler said. Hassler claims that nearly all the players within the core nucleus of his team led by example at one time or another during the season. Senior captain Adam Reynolds (Honeoye Falls/Honeoye Falls-Lima), however, impressed him most with his tremendous overall leadership capabilities. "Adam is a leader on and off the field," states Hassler. "He has the ability to keep his teammates focused and challenges them to play their best." Hassler also found the play of Ball to be exceptional. Ball collected 73 saves and posted three shutouts, while only allowing 19 goals over the course of the season. According to Hassler, "Kevin has blossomed into one of the best keepers in the region." What was most impressive about the Saxons' 2000 season was the team's ability to repeatedly find the back of the net. The Saxons broke the school record for most goals scored in a single season with 51 for an average of three goals per game. The previous record of 49 was held by Alfred's 1988 team. Leading the way on offense were sophomore midfielder Karl Gnann (Holley/Holley), with 19 points (8G, 3A); junior forward Guy-Robert Desir (Queens Village/Springfield Gardens), 17 points (6G, 5A); junior midfielder Jon Bridges (Topeka, KS/Topeka), 17 points (5G, 7A); sophomore forward Andy Gennarini (Monroe, CT/Masuk), 11 points (5G, 1A), and junior defender Scott Wallace (Wayne, NJ/Wayne), 10 points (5G). Many younger players also contributed as the season progressed and they gained experience. Freshman forward Keith Phelan (Baldwin/Baldwin) finished with eight points (4G, 1A); sophomore midfielder Shane Donohoe (Syracuse/West Genesee) scored eight points (4G); freshman forward Jim Kopsaftis (Port Murray, NJ/Voorhees) had seven points (3G, 1A); junior forward Kevin McGee (Seaford/St. Anthony's) chipped in 5 points (2G, 1A); sophomore midfielder Rick DeSalvo (Bath/Bath-Haverling) had 5 points (1G, 3A); freshman forward Andy Kernahan (Cuba/Cuba-Rushford) scored 3 points (1G, 1A) and freshman defender Chris Dionne (New Preston, CT/Shepaug) finished with 3 assists. Hassler contends that the 2000 season may be regarded as one of the best ever at Alfred University and with the Saxons returning all but two players -- only Reynolds (3G) and midfielder Marc Fittipaldi (Pittsford/Pittsford-Sutherland) (1G, 6A) are lost to graduation -- many are already anxiously anticipating the start of next season. Though expectations are high, the team is both excited and very optimistic about what next year may bring. "This truly is a team of elite athletes with high goals and expectations," says Hassler. "This team not only says they want to be the best, but is willing to do the work to make it

happen. That's what makes them special. The players have already started training for next season with an eye on the tournament."As Alfred looks ahead to the 2001 season Hassler acknowledges that to succeed in their run for the championship the Saxons will need to improve several aspects of their game. "We graduate two outstanding athletes, key players in this year's success. Their spots will be filled by next year's freshmen. Fortunately, Alfred University's combination of excellent academics, exceptional financial aid and exciting soccer will help to attract many talented recruits."Tactically the team will continue to build on the success of this season's attacking style while refocusing on solid defending. This season we established new records for most goals in a season, next year we want to set a new mark for fewest allowed."Determined, talented and focusedall describe the Alfred University men's soccer team. With these qualities Hassler sees no reason why the 2001 Saxon's won't be crowned champions at season's end.