

## Saxons ♦ Rockwood hopes to kick his way into NFL

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ALFRED, NY - Eric Rockwood (Allegany, NY/Allegany-Limestone) has joined All-American linebacker Nick Clark (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood) as former AU football players with dreams of a career in the National Football League. Rockwood, a three-time all-Empire 8 placekicker who wrapped up his AU playing career last fall, heads to Phoenix, AZ, this weekend, where he'll showcase his skills at a pre-NFL Draft combine for kickers. Clark is training in Texas for a combine in Ohio later this month. The College Senior Specialist Combine Rockwood is attending is run by Gary Zauner, a former special teams coach in the NFL, and is aimed at providing college kickers and punters a chance to demonstrate their abilities and, hopefully, catch the eyes of NFL scouts. Rockwood flew out of Rochester for Phoenix on Thursday, March 1, and will remain in Arizona until Monday. On Saturday, he and about 25 other NFL hopefuls will put their abilities to the test during the placekicking portion of the combine. He explained that each kicker attempts six field goals from various ranges - between 34 to 60 yards, from each hash mark - and be given more attempts for making all six. Each will then attempt four kickoffs. Zauner "rates each kicker on a scale," Rockwood explained. The top kickers are rated as performing on an NFL level; the next tier demonstrate an ability to kick in the NFL, with improvement; and the last tier doesn't show an ability to kick at the pro level. NFL scouts aren't permitted to attend the combine. Instead, Zauner will send film and his analysis and rating of the top kickers at the combine to NFL scouts, who will use the information as a resource when considering what kickers to either draft or sign as undrafted free agents. Rockwood learned about the College Senior Specialist Combine from Adam Tanalski, a former University at Buffalo kicker whose Buffalo-based kicking camp, Hammer Kicking Academy, Rockwood attended last summer. He has been working out on his kicking periodically with Tanalski. An acquaintance of Zauner, Tanalski suggested Rockwood attend the combine Zauner runs in Phoenix. Regardless of how he tests out at this weekend's combine - Zauner will notify each kicker of their ratings early next week - Rockwood, who is set to graduate in May with a degree in accounting, is excited about the opportunity. He said he couldn't have pictured having the success he did at Alfred, let alone attending a pro combine, when he came to the AU campus four years ago. "Our high school went 0-9 my senior year. I really didn't think I had a future in football. But as I started to have success in college, I gained confidence," he said. "Regardless of what happens, it's been a great experience."