

Experience, depth mark 2006-07 AU men's basketball team

10/23/06

ALFRED, NY As Jay Murphy prepares to begin his 12th season as head coach of the Alfred University men's basketball team, he is excited about a handful of returnees from last year's squad and a host of talented newcomers who will combine to give the Saxons more depth and balance than they've had in recent years. For the last several seasons, the Alfred University men's basketball team has had no shortage of talented guards, often putting three and even four on the floor at the same time. There was, however, a relative dearth of post men and the Saxons often suffered on the boards. That should change this year with the return of senior all-conference center Dillon Stein (North Huntingdon Township, PA/Norwin) and the addition of two big men in junior Jamie Waite (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy) and freshman Pat Smithgall (Perry, NY/Perry). All three are 6-6 and give AU increased flexibility and stronger presence in the low post. "The biggest improvement will be in rebounding, especially on the defensive end," Murphy said. Indeed, rebounding was a concern last season, when AU was outrebounded 947-828, with 321 of opponents' boards coming off their own missed shots. "We gave up way too many second chances last year," Murphy said. "Having those guys this year will help us limit (the opponents') second chances and increase ours." Leading the frontcourt will be Stein, the Empire 8 Conference Rookie of the Year three seasons ago and a Second Team conference all star each of his three seasons at AU. Stein was hampered by injury early last season, missing the first three games, but came back strong, averaging 13 points and seven rebounds per game while shooting a team-best 54 percent from the floor. Murphy expects big things from his senior captain this year. "Dillon has been one of the best post players in our league the last three years," he said. "He was hurt some last year but he's back and healthy. We expect a great senior year from him." Adding depth in the post are Waite, a junior college transfer, and Smithgall, a rebounding machine in high school. Waite played two seasons at Corning Community College, where he averaged 6.5 points and 7.2 rebounds last year. Smithgall averaged 8.8 points and 16.7 rebounds as a senior at Perry High, setting the school's single-game rebounding record with 26. "Jamie and Pat are great rebounders," Murphy commented. "Jamie will really help us on the defensive end and Pat just has a great nose for the ball and will get much better offensively with experience." Having Waite and Smithgall in the lineup means Murphy can keep senior guard/forward Ryan Clemenson (Ovid, NY/South Seneca) primarily at small forward. One of the Saxons' most versatile players throughout his career, Clemenson has seen time at both guard and forward positions and filled in at center. The 6-4 senior captain averaged 6.2 points and 5.3 rebounds and had 29 steals as a junior. "Ryan is our defensive stopper," Murphy said. "We want him to be more consistent as a rebounder and on offense. Having him at the three will help. And, with the added depth we have, he'll be fresher." Adding depth to the Saxon frontcourt are sophomore Joel Bigelow (Ilion, NY/Ilion), junior Jared Hyatt (Newark, NY/Newark) and freshman James Simermeyer (East Norwich, NY/Long Island Lutheran). Simermeyer averaged nearly 15 points and 10 boards his senior year of high school. Hyatt, a former backup quarterback for the football team, joined the basketball team last season and played primarily on the junior varsity, as did Bigelow, who Murphy said has shown solid improvement from his freshman campaign and should be the fourth post player in the rotation. While adding depth in the frontcourt was a major priority after last season, the Saxon roster has its usual complement of guards, including senior point guard Robby McCarter (Wooster, OH/Wooster) and junior swingman Garlen Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland). McCarter is a solid shooter who averaged 9.8 points shooting 45 percent from the floor (39 percent on three-pointers) and 84 percent on foul shots and 3.5 rebounds per game. Patt averaged 4.5 points and 2.5 boards per contest. "Robby will start at the point for us and play some two-guard," Murphy said of McCarter, who started a handful of games last year. "He's one of our better perimeter defenders and is a good shooter. We need him to push the ball and distribute in transition." Patt is a talented jump-shooter who Murphy expects will look for his shot more than in his first two seasons. "Garlen needs to be more aggressive. He's one of our better passers, but he has to take a more active role driving to the hoop and shooting." Two other veteran guards junior Tom Cluckey (East Aurora, NY/East Aurora) and sophomore Carl Embury (Perry, NY/Perry) return as well. Cluckey did not play last season and Embury played primarily on junior varsity. Both are solid perimeter shooters who will compete for playing time this season. "Carl can come in and score, but he needs to become more aggressive," Murphy said. "We expect him to come in and give us some good minutes. He's one of our best pure shooters and he can play (shooting guard or small forward)." Garlen Patt's younger brother, freshman guard Jared Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland), and freshman Jon Maroney (Lockport, NY/Lockport) are expected to see their share of playing time on the varsity this year. Murphy said Patt, an all-region performer who scored more than 1,500 points in his high school career, is a solid

all-around player who can shoot, pass and defend and should begin the season backing up McCarter at the point. Maroney, who averaged 15 points per game as a high school senior, is a quick, tenacious defender who Murphy said will play primarily shooting guard. Adding depth at the guard position are freshmen Chaz Best (Rochester, NY/Franklin), Matt Johnson (Delanson, NY/Duanesburg) and Josh Infante (New York, NY/School of Economics and Finance). Murphy is encouraged by the talent and depth of his team's backcourt. "They're very athletic, smart and cohesive," he said of his guards. Having a combination of experience and depth in the post and in the backcourt will help the Saxons diversify their game. While in the last two seasons, AU has been very successful running its set offense, it hasn't been as effective in the fast break. Murphy wants that to change this year. "We've been good in the half-court, and we do want to make the extra pass when it's there to get higher percentage shots, but I'd also like to see us become more effective in transition," Murphy explained. Improvement on defense is also key. Last year, AU allowed opponents to shoot 46.3 percent and gave up nearly 13 offensive rebounds per contest. "We can't allow as many second shots. It's been our emphasis from day one. So many times last season, we played a great sequence on defense and (the opponent) would get the rebound and score," Murphy said. "We need to do a better job stopping dribble penetration and force everything to the outside." Alfred will look to finish in the top four in the Empire 8 Conference standings and qualify for the conference championship tournament, the winner of which earns a berth in the NCAA Division III championships. Murphy hopes a challenging early-season schedule, which includes tournaments hosted by NYU and Randolph-Macon and contests against St. Lawrence, Potsdam, Geneseo and Cortland, will prime his players for the rigors of Empire 8 play. Murphy is confident that with solid veteran play and leadership, combined with contributions from the team's new players, can help the Saxons earn the school's first-ever Empire 8 tournament bid. "We're experienced and young at the same time, so we'll need some of our newcomers to step in and help us right away," he said. "The team has really come together and they want to learn and get better. We should be a very competitive team."