

Sixteen Saxons earn Empire 8 honors; Murray named Coach of the Year

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ALFRED, NY Sixteen members of the Alfred University football team were named Empire 8 Conference all-stars, the conference announced Thursday. AU head coach Dave Murray was named the conference's Coach of the Year. Murray earned his first-ever Coach of the Year honors from the Empire 8 after leading the Saxons to an 8-2 overall record in the regular season (5-1 Empire 8). Alfred's second place finish in the conference standings is the team's best ever. Senior linebacker Brenton Brady (Rochester, NY/Marshall) and junior strong safety Aaron Meyers (Delevan, NY/Pioneer) were selected to the defensive First Team, while sophomore tailback Elmer Newsome (Cadosia, NY/Hancock), senior tight end Chris Reger (Warsaw, NY/Warsaw) and senior tackle Matt Nelson (Glens Falls, NY/Glens Falls) earned offensive First Team honors. Brady and Meyers headline a Saxon defense that leads the conference in scoring defense (15.1 points per game), total defense (260.1 yards per game) and rushing defense (99.4 yards per game). AU is 22nd, 24th and 32nd, respectively, in national rankings. Brady earned First Team honors for a third straight year. The Saxons' leading tackler and the 2004 Empire 8 Conference Player of the Year, he finished the regular season with 92 tackles (58 solo). He had seven sacks, 12.5 tackles for loss, an interception and two blocked kicks. His four forced fumbles lead the conference and rank fifth in the nation. Brady's 92 tackles give him three straight years with at least 90 stops. Brady, the Saxons' short yardage back, has rushed for a team-high 10 touchdowns, which ranks sixth in the conference. Meyers finished the regular season with 73 tackles (50 solo, six for loss), third on the team and eighth in the conference. His four interceptions are tied for the team lead and ranks second in the Empire 8. The 2003 conference Rookie of the Year and an honorable mention all-star last season, this marks the first time Meyers has been named to the Empire 8 First Team. Newsome led an AU rushing offense that netted 171.4 yards per game. In his first year as the Saxons' starting tailback, he had five 100-yard rushing games and finished the regular season with 1,098 yards rushing, which ranks second in the conference. Reger, a solid blocker and receiver, led Empire 8 tight ends with 26 catches and 337 yards receiving to go with three touchdowns. For Reger, a converted fullback, this marks the first time he has earned all-Empire 8 honors. Nelson earned all-conference honors for a second time (he earned Second Team honors last season) after anchoring a line that helped the Saxons to 367 yards in offense per game (171.6 rushing and 195.4 passing) and allowed a conference-low seven sacks. Four Saxons earned defensive Second Team honors: junior end Andy Rantz (Montandon, PA/Milton Area), sophomore tackle Don Miller (LeRoy, NY/LeRoy), junior linebacker Nick Gatto (Maple Grove, NY/Bemus Point) and sophomore linebacker Blake Fuller (Newark, NY/Newark). Rantz had 40 tackles during the regular season and led the team in tackles for loss (17) and sacks (11). He led the Empire 8 in sacks and was second in tackles for loss and ranks 15th and 27th nationally in those categories. Rantz earned honorable mention from the Empire 8 last season. Miller had 57 tackles this season, including seven for loss and a pair of sacks, and one fumble recovery. He was an honorable mention conference all-star as a freshman in 2004. Gatto was second in the team in tackles and fourth in the conference with 87 (45 solo). He had four tackles for loss, a sack and five passes defended. This marks the first time Gatto has received all-conference honors. Fuller was named to the Second Team a season after earning honorable mention as a freshman. He was fourth on the team in tackles with 67 (37 solo) and third in tackles for loss and sacks with eight and six, respectively. His sack total ranks eighth in the Empire 8. Earning offensive Second Team honors were junior tackle Mike Yokopovich (Webster, NY/Webster Schroeder) and sophomore placekicker Chris Reynolds (Pittsford, NY/Pittsford-Sutherland). Yokopovich, also a Second Team conference all-star last year, helped the Saxons rack up 367 yards in offense per game and was part of a line that allowed a conference-low seven quarterback sacks. Reynolds, an honorable mention selection as a freshman in 2004, made a conference-high eight field goals this year. He made 92.9 percent of his extra points attempts (26 of 28), which ranks second in the Empire 8. Saxons given honorable mention from the Empire 8 included sophomore quarterback Paul Keeley (Caledonia, NY/Caledonia-Mumford), senior wide receiver Craig Zarzycki (Gansevoort, NY/Schuylerville), junior cornerback Mike Coupe (New Hartford, NY/New Hartford), freshman free safety Brian Nitsche (Portville, NY/Portville) and sophomore punter Josh Rammacher (Angloa, NY/Lake Shore). Keeley has thrown for 1,954 yards (fourth best ever for a single season at AU) and a school single-season record 18 touchdowns. Zarzycki leads the Saxons in receiving yards (521) and TD catches (six) and was second on the team in receptions with 39. Coupe has three interceptions, six pass breakups and 34 tackles. Nitsche has turned in a solid freshman campaign with 40 tackles (sixth on the team) and four interceptions (tied for the team lead and second in the conference). His eight pass breakups and 12 passes defended lead the team and rank third in the Empire 8.

Rammacher, an honorable mention selection last season as well, is third in the conference in punting average (38.3 yards per punt). A football player from each Empire 8 institution was awarded Sportsman of the Year honors. Honorees, chosen by their coaches, exhibited outstanding sportsmanship in keeping with the conference's mission of "competing with honor and integrity." Alfred's honoree is Keeley. The Saxons will wrap up their season Saturday, Nov. 19, at noon at Merrill Field, when they host Maine Maritime Academy in the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) North Atlantic Bowl Championship.