

AU volleyball team seeks to build on improved play

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ALFRED, NY - The Alfred University volleyball team made great strides in 2010, notching seven wins to finish the season with a 7-19 mark. With 11 players returning, including five of six starters, and a solid group of recruits, the Saxons will look to continue improving in Ron Higgins' second season as head coach. Alfred's record last fall was deceiving, as the Saxons won two Empire 8 crossover tournament matches. Before the 2010 campaign, no AU team had won a match at the tournament since 2007, when the conference first implemented a two-site format for the tournament. The seven wins were the most in a season since the 2005 team went 7-20. The Saxons started four freshmen last season - outside hitters Paige Jensen (Weiser, ID/Weiser) and Chelsea Hall (Grand Island, NY/Grand Island), middle hitter Samantha Wood (Newfield, NY/Newfield) and setter Tara Barone (Derby, NY/Lake Shore) and they, along with senior four-year starting outside hitter Emily Crosby (Fairport, NY/Fairport) will help lead the team again this year. Jensen had a team-best 158 kills; Wood had 85 kills and a team-leading 35 blocks; Hall had 145 kills, 208 digs, 22 blocks, and team-best 28 service aces; and Barone and sophomore Janelle Gallipeau (Rochester, NY/Greece Olympia), who shared starting setter duties in 2010, each had a team-leading 236 assists last year. Crosby led the team in digs with 218 and had 116 kills. Higgins is excited about his returning letterwinners, who he feels are poised to build on the experience from a season ago. "(Crosby) as a four-year letterwinner is a leader and she does a great job in practice. She'll have a big role in our success this season, and she'll be playing on the back line more," Higgins commented. "Wood played a lot for us in the middle last year and she was great as a freshman. She and (sophomore) Kelsey Brand (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy) will see time in the middle. I have great expectations for both of them. (Brand, 44 kills, 14 blocks in 2010) will be counted on to have a greater impact on our success." Of Jensen and Hall, Higgins is expecting continued solid play and improvements upon very good freshman campaigns. "They did well as freshmen, but have really worked hard to improve. They'll be huge for us offensively and defensively," the coach said. "Barone and Gallipeau will split time at setter," Higgins said. "They bring different skills to the court. When one is hot, she'll see playing time that day." Junior Jennifer Miranda (Bronx, NY/Academy of Letters) and sophomore Brittany Anselment (Baldwinsville, NY/C.W. Baker) are candidates to replace departed starting defensive specialist Erika Huyck. Anselment (169 digs, 25 service aces) "played well last year and will have an expanded role," Higgins said. Miranda saw limited time in 2010 (three games) but could compete for more minutes in 2011. A group of newcomers will look to make immediate contributions. Freshman Taylor Kiernan (Patchogue, NY/Patchogue-Medford) will see time as libero and defensive specialist, and freshman Laura Brennan (Mansfield, PA/Mansfield) will play right side hitter and see some time in the middle. (Taylor) was solid in our preseason scrimmages and (Brennan) is growing into the college game. With her size (5-11), we look for her to develop into a force on the front line. "Senior Nicole Hedrick (Albany, NY/Catholic Central) and sophomore Jackie Tomisman (Niskayuna, NY/Niskayuna), both softball players at AU, are playing volleyball at AU for the first time. Hedrick will compete for time as defensive specialist and Tomisman as right side hitter. Adding depth to the team will be sophomores Kelly Bly (Waterford, NY/Machanicville) and Lisa Fyvie (Scotia, NY/Scotia-Glenville) and freshman Tiffany Webber (Delhi, NY/Delaware Academy). Higgins has seen some good things from his young team in the preseason and also some areas in need of improvement, but overall is encouraged by the Saxons' prospects. "I'm very encouraged. They're a hungry group. A lot of them had success in high school and want that at the college level and

are willing to work for it. Defensively we need to get better, but that comes with experience. Our strength is the overall cohesiveness here. Team chemistry has been phenomenal. We saw it last year, where we struggled and lost a bunch of matches in a row, then came on strong at the end," Higgins said. "We're building on last year now, working every day to get better. We can't be satisfied with winning couple Empire 8 matches. We really want to be more competitive in the conference."