

Three returning starters lead 2006 AU men's tennis team

3/16/06

ALFRED, NY With four of six first stringers returning, including three all-conference performers, the AU men's tennis team looks to compete in the Empire 8 Conference under first-year head coach Brooke Harris. The Saxons will be without three-time Empire 8 All-Star Randy Vecchione, who graduated in 2005, but do have the veteran leadership of a trio of talented seniors in Andrew Lee (Scarsdale, NY/Trinity Pawling), Kevin Dillon (Scio, NY/Wellsville) and Steve Ventura (Hilton, NY/Hilton). "We lost our number one singles player and even when you have a quantity of players coming back, as we do, it's still a rebuilding year," Harris commented. "But we have some good solid players coming back, and other teams in the conference have lost top players, so I think we'll remain competitive." Lee has earned Second Team all-conference recognition the last three years and is coming off a junior year in which he went 10-2 in singles play. He is a candidate to take over Vecchione's first singles spot. Dillon earned Second Team recognition from the Empire 8 in doubles in 2004 and looks to improve on his 8-4 mark in singles in 2005. Dillon and Lee went 3-1 in second doubles last season. Ventura had an 8-4 singles record in 2005, earning him honorable mention from the Empire 8. He and 2005 graduate Tim Inthirakoth went 6-6 in third doubles last year. Other returnees who will look to find increased roles this season will be senior John Reagan (Skaneateles, NY/Skaneateles) and junior Garri Stratiev (Brooklyn, NY/Fort Hamilton) and sophomores David Cleveland (Webster, NY/East Rochester), Robert Festa (Fairport, NY/Fairport) and Mike Christofferson (Endwell, NY/Maine-Endwell). A pair of freshmen Tim Pruyn (North Tonawanda, NY/Niagara-Wheatfield) and Alex Weller (Flemington, NJ/Hunterdon Central) will also compete for playing time. The Saxons will look to improve on last year's 7-5 overall mark, which included a 3-5 mark in regular season conference play and a fourth-place finish in the conference championship tournament. With the talented veterans on this year's squad AU has a solid chance to compete in the postseason conference championship and improve on last year's fourth-place finish. "Our goal is to improve throughout the year and get some experience for our younger players," Harris said.