

AU men's soccer team seeks to improve on disappointing 2002 campaign

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ALFRED The Alfred University men's soccer team enters the 2003 season with a heightened sense of urgency as it seeks prove once again that they deserve to be on top of the Empire 8. After a disappointing campaign in 2002, the Saxon coaching staff is encouraged by great off-season workouts and a solid recruiting class that has many players contending for positions right away. "I am very excited about how hard the veterans worked this off-season and our incoming freshmen look stronger then would be expected at this stage in the season," said head coach Ken Hassler. The Saxons return 12 players from last years' squad that posted an overall record of 4-10-1 and finished with an Empire 8 mark of 1-5. Hassler attributes the roller coaster season to the inconsistency caused by key injuries throughout the season. The team averaged 2.14 goals per game, down from 3.5 the year before. "Everyone looked to Karl (Gnann, the team's leading scorer in 2002) to carry the team, but this year we have so many weapons that the burden will not fall on just one player," said Hassler. "The players on this team are making my job easy. They have the right attitude and are very coachable and they adjust immediately to whatever I have to tell them," Hassler added. "I feel the work ethic of the returning players, the chemistry of the team, and the skill-level of the freshman class all combine to make this years' team better than the previous two." AU will once again look to capitalize on their creative shot selection and attacking nature. Leading the Saxon attack will be seniors Keith Phelan (Baldwin/Baldwin), who finished the 2002 season with six goals and two assists, and Ian Hoffman (Halifax, PA/Halifax) who notched one goal last season. "Keith is a tireless worker and an exceptional finisher and I expect he will contribute a lot. Ian is very solid technically and does all of the little things well," said Hassler. Junior forward Austin Lozier (Vestal/Vestal) who posted three goals and one assist in 2002, will be counted on to shoulder more of the scoring load. Freshmen Brian Piccardo (Aspinwall, PA/Fox Chapel Area) and Bobby Linaberry (Manlius/Fayetteville-Manlius) are also expected to provide offensive production. "Piccardo is a solid attacking player who plays well with his back to the goal. While Linaberry is a fierce tireless competitor who possesses great speed and a hard shot," said Hassler. In the midfield, senior Brian Donahoe (Elmira/Elmira Free) and junior Ethan Weikleenget (Amherst/Amherst) will be called upon to maintain the tempo and flow of play. "Brian is a strong athlete that is playing as well as ever and is developing into a steady leader. He also is a very creative distributor and covers the field well. Also, Ethan is one of our best play makers and is the driving force for getting the ball down the field," Hassler said. A player that will add depth and leadership to the midfield position is Zach Hunkele (Elmira/Elmira Free Academy). "He has the ability to be both a hard nosed defender and a dangerous attacker," Hassler said. Rounding out the Saxon midfield will be freshman David Suddaby (Baldwinsville/C.W. Baker) and junior Mike DeLorenzo (Wantaugh/MacArthur). On defense, the Saxons will look to juniors Randy Clukey (Bath, ME/Morse) and Stephen Robin (Foster, RI/Ponaganset) and a pair of sophomores, Alex Karp (Clinton, CT/Morgan) and Adam Morgan (Byron/Byron-Bergen). According to Hassler, all four players are tough individual defenders. Freshmen Jim Roberts (Syracuse/Westhill) and Brian Middleton (Baldwinsville/C.W. Baker) and sophomore William Brown (Woodbury, VT/Hazen Union) are competing for the starting job in goal. "The trio pushes themselves and each other," said Hassler. With a strong core of returning players and an exceptional group of recruits, the Saxons are anxiously awaiting the start of the 2003 season. The combination of seasoned veterans and talented new recruits has combined to produce a team with the right winning attitude and a sense that this is the year to climb back on top of the Empire 8. "We're entering the season with high expectations," stated Hassler. "We have a lot of experience and leadership. We also have a very strong recruiting class. This drive, accompanied with our positive attitude has made me extremely excited to be coaching this team." 2