

AU men's lacrosse team looks to move up ranks of the Empire 8

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ALFRED, NY The Alfred University men's lacrosse team has improved steadily in each of Jason Lockner's four seasons as head coach. Lockner hopes that trend continues in 2010, with the Saxons ultimately reaching its first-ever Empire 8 Conference championship tournament. Scoring shouldn't be a problem, as the Saxons possess a potent offense that returns three of its top four goal-scorers from last year's 8-7 squad (1-7 Empire 8). A potent attack, and deep and balanced midfield, will lead the Saxons early as a young defense that lost all three starters from 2009 gains experience. "The offense is going to put the ball in the back of the net," Lockner commented. "The defense will have to get used to having a lot of new faces, but once we get them going, I expect them to be good." The attack will be led by the Saxons' top two goal scorers from last season: senior Mike Russo (Mattydale, NY/Cicero-North Syracuse) and junior Marc Zoyhofski (Blasdell, NY/Frontier). Russo, a midfielder his first two seasons, netted a team-best 27 goals to go with four assists in 2009; Zoyhofski led the team in points (46) with 25 goals and 21 assists and had 29 groundballs, tops among attackmen. The two are co-captains this year. "(Zoyhofski) has led us in scoring since his freshman year. He's a complete, well-rounded player who can really shoot and distribute the ball," Lockner commented. "(Russo) is our only four-year letterwinner so we'll count on him for leadership. He'll be more balanced this year, not just scoring but distributing and carrying, picking up groundballs." Sophomore Paul Eaton (Buffalo, NY/St. Francis) will start on attack alongside Zoyhofski and Russo. As a freshman, Eaton had 10 points on eight goals and two assists; Lockner said he expects his scoring output to go up in 2010. "Paul has improved a lot. He'll really help open up our offense." Sophomore James Cahill (Sugar Land, TX/Clements) will play a greater role on the attack after seeing limited time as a freshman (three games, no points). Freshmen Ryan Felice (Watertown, NY/Watertown) and Charlie Barbay (Seneca Falls, NY/Mynderse) provide depth on attack. Midfield will be the deepest and most balanced unit on the field for the Saxons. Junior Justin Kieffer (Middletown, MD/Middletown) is the leading scorer among returning middies (19 goals and an assist in 2009). He'll be joined on the top line by sophomore Dave Malave (Shoreham, NY/Shoreham-Wading River) and freshman Matt Zon (Tonawanda, NY/Sweet Home). "(Kieffer) has always had the ability to score, but he's become a much better shooter (percentage-wise) and (Malave) will see his scoring go up this year. He's a very complete player, probably our best all-around midfielder," Lockner said. "(Zon) has a real nice shot and will be one of our primary faceoff men." Sophomore Brendan Murphy (Buffalo, NY/Bishop Timon-St. Jude) (six goals, three assists in 2009) will lead the second midfield unit. Other midfielders expected to contribute offensively are senior Sean Roberts (Whitney Point, NY/Whitney Point) (two goals last year), sophomore James Whyel (Markleysburg, PA/Mercersburg Academy) and freshmen Scott Johnston (Akron, NY/Akron), Matt Hodnik (Binghamton, NY/Binghamton) and Eric Jelen (Nanuet, NY/Clarkstown South). Johnston, who as a high school senior set the Section VI record and tied the New York State mark for goals in a game (13), possesses one of the hardest shots on the team. A trio of juniors Joe Gibbs (Whitesboro, NY/Whitesboro), Kevin Kostyk (Islamorada, FL/Seneca (NJ)) and Adam Schutz (Geneva, NY/Geneva) will see time as short-stick defensive midfielders: Kostyk (one goal, one assist, 24 groundballs last year) is the Saxons' top returning faceoff man from last season (38 of 81) and Gibbs had an assist and 27 groundballs. Schutz moves to the midfield after playing goalie the last two seasons and Lockner expects him to make an immediate impact on the AU defensive efforts. "He's an incredible athlete who is going to help us tremendously on our faceoffs and in our man-down situations," Locker said of Schutz. Adding depth

to the AU midfield will be sophomore Mike Ciepiela (Marilla, NY/Iroquois) and freshman Simon Chon (Farmington, CT/Farmington). "Our midfield is the strength of our team, along with out offense," Lockner said. "We have a lot of depth and talent and this is the best group of defensive midfielders I've had here." The Saxon defenders will be inexperienced, as only junior Trent Thurston (Ontario, NY/Webster Schroeder) saw any meaningful minutes in 2009, tallying eight groundballs in 12 games. Lockner is encouraged by the return of sophomore Alex Hamilton (Corning, NY/Corning East) and with freshman Jake Spadoni (Webster, NY/Webster Schroeder). Hamilton was penciled in to start last season before an injury suffered in the preseason knocked him out for the year; Spadoni is expected to step right in a start. Freshman Dave Konnick (Vestal, NY/Vestal) will compete with Thurston for a starting spot on defense, and junior Eddie Anderson (Palmyra, NY/Palmyra-Macedon), a transfer from Finger Lakes Community College, will compete for time on defense as well. Freshmen Chris Frauenhofer (Hamburg, NY/Frontier) and junior Dustin Jacobson (Cicero, NY/Cicero-North Syracuse), a transfer from Onondaga Community College, will see time as long stick midfielders. Providing depth to the Saxons' defense are freshmen Gary Schreib (Fairport, NY/Penfield) and Theo Tomczak (Elba, NY/Elba). Freshman Tim Doyle (Macedon, NY/Palmyra-Macedon) will take over for Schutz in goal. Lockner said Doyle is solid between the pipes, both stopping the ball and making the outlet pass. Sophomore John Landi (Putnam Valley, NY/Putnam Valley) and freshman Justin Becker (Conesus, NY/Livonia) will compete to back up Doyle in goal. Lockner hopes his young defense will gain experience and improve steadily early in the season and become a strength by the time the Saxons' Empire 8 slate opens March 31 at Nazareth. Solid play by the attack and midfield, something the coach expects, will help as the defense gains its footing. "The big thing the defense is lacking right now is chemistry and experience, and that will come," Lockner commented. "Talent-wise, we're pretty strong." Areas of improvement needed from this year's team include groundballs opponents held a 545-457 advantage in groundballs in and faceoffs Alfred won only 42.5 percent of its draws in 2009. "We need to improve in both areas to maintain possession, create more scoring chances and keep pressure off the defense," Lockner said, adding that it's important the Saxons maintain its success rate on man-up situations (30 percent) and continue playing solid man-down defense (25 percent last year). The coach is encouraged by the direction the team has taken, from the fall season forward. "This is a very coachable team that I feel will gel and come around quickly. It's just a matter of getting them out on the field and being battle-tested," he said. The Saxons open their 2010 campaign on Saturday, Feb. 27, at 1 p.m. at home against King's College.