

## AU women's soccer coach encouraged by depth and experience in 2004

8/30/04

ALFRED For the last two seasons, the Alfred University women's soccer team has gone through the growing pains that come with youth and experience. Head coach Jaime McLaughlin is optimistic this year's team, which mixes battle-tested veterans and talented newcomers, will be the best she's had in her tenure at AU. "We have experience and talent across the board," said McLaughlin, who begins her fourth season as head coach. "This is the most balanced team I've had since I've been here." All but three starters return from a season ago, when the Lady Saxons posted a 5-11-1 record (0-6-1 in Empire 8 Conference play). Among the returnees are the team's two top scorers: senior forward Ellen Brandfonbrener (Franklin, MA/Medway), who scored 18 points on eight goals and two assists and was given honorable mention by the Empire 8 a year ago; and sophomore forward Chelsea Hall (Elmira/Elmira Free Academy), who tallied 14 points on six goals and a pair of assists. The two shared team MVP honors in 2003. Brandfonbrener and Hall are "the two biggest returnees for us from a scoring standpoint," McLaughlin said. "Ellen has great ball skills and is a good finisher calm on the attack. Chelsea is more tenacious and will take it right to the net." A trio of freshmen forwards - Sarah Guest (Cohocton/Wayland-Cohocton), Whitney Vitale (Red Creek/Red Creek) and Alyssa Hatch (Allegany/Allegany-Limestone) will add talent and depth to the front line. Hatch will also see playing time at midfield. McLaughlin said the team will be more aggressive than it has been in the last couple years, creating and taking advantage of more scoring opportunities. That, she hopes, will result in an improvement on last year, when AU was outscored 40-28. "We can't be as timid on offense as we were last season. We need to take the shots when we have them," she said. Senior Ashley Van Wie (Gloversville/Gloversville) and junior Adrienne Egglinger (Amityville/Amityville) will anchor the midfield. Both will play on the outside, utilizing their speed and playmaking abilities. "They both have good quickness and are solid passers," McLaughlin commented. Van Wie scored two goals and assisted on one last year. Junior Braelin Thornton (Orford, NH/Kimball Union) and sophomores Melissa Polakos (Marlboro, NJ/Marlboro) and Kristen Klein (Middletown/Goshen) return after seeing significant time in 2003. Thornton moves to midfield after starting seven games on defense last year. "We have a ton of depth at midfield," McLaughlin said. "They're a very confident group that reads the field well and can pass when and where they need to. The key is that they are showing much more patience than last season." McLaughlin is optimistic about the play of her defense, which will be anchored by junior Morgan Pierce (Schoharie/Schoharie) and senior Courtney Briganti (Canisteo/Canisteo). Pierce, a starter her first two years at AU, will play on the outside, while Briganti is expected to see the bulk of the duty from the center midfield (stopper) position. Freshman Yaicha Winters (Cambridge/Cambridge) is expected to start at sweeper. "She's an amazing sweeper. She's very quick with unbelievable skills," McLaughlin said of Winters. Freshmen Mara Limoncelli (Elmira/Elmira Free Academy) can play both sweeper and stopper. Sophomores Jessica Brewster (Andover/Andover), Kristen Rasey (Allegany/Allegany-Limestone) and Laura LaPierre (Maplecrest/Windham-Ashland-Jewett) and freshmen Megan Schumacher (Cohocton/Wayland-Cohocton) and Brittany Higgins (Johnstown/Johnstown) will provide depth on defense. "We have so much depth on defense and we're so much faster this year," McLaughlin said. "One of our goals was to increase the speed of our defense, because we were getting beaten to a lot of balls last year." Sophomores Brianna Paquette (West Burke, VT/St. Johnsbury) and Rebecca Pociask (Henniker, NH/John Stark Regional) will compete for time in goal. Paquette started nine games last year and logged three shutouts with a 2.11 goals against average. Pociask allowed 2.57 goals per game with one shutout. Both will benefit from an improved defense, as Alfred was outshot 255-163 in 2003. "They're both solid keepers with good reaction to the ball and their communication skills have really developed," McLaughlin commented. "Our keepers are going to need to come up with some big saves, but we'll need our defense to take some of the pressure off them." McLaughlin is confident the Lady Saxons will win their share of games and achieve their goal of earning a berth in the four-team Empire 8 tournament, the winner of which will play in the NCAA championships. "We have the talent and the depth," she said. "The key will be our ability to come together as a team."