

AU men's soccer team aims for return to postseason

8/31/12

ALFRED, NY — Alfred University head men's soccer coach Scott Miller is encouraged by a 2012 team that he feels is poised to challenge for a spot in the Empire 8 Conference championship tournament.

The roster is made up of several experienced veterans who welcome the arrival of a host of talented newcomers. Miller likes what he has seen in the preseason, and he hopes the hard work ethic and enthusiasm his group has shown will help the Saxons return to the E8 championships for the first time since 2006.

"They're all having fun," said Miller, whose team opens the 2012 season Friday (Aug. 31) against Medaille in the first round of the SUNY Oswego Tournament. "There's great chemistry there, which is so important."

Miller described his teams as "balanced," with neither offense nor defense standing out over the other. His team will stress being more stingy on defense and extending its own possessions to create more scoring opportunities.

In 2011, when the Saxons went 7-8-2 (1-5-0 Empire 8), Alfred scored 1.77 goals per game, but allowed 1.95. The team had six losses by two or fewer goals (including four one-goal setbacks, two in conference play). One, at Penn College, saw the Saxons score four times, but lost 5-4.

"We're aiming to give up fewer goals," he said. "We'll score enough, but we need to give up far fewer. We need to extend the possessions in our own offensive and minimize our mistakes in the back."

The offense will be led by a pair of forwards with a knack for scoring senior Frankie Mannino (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy) and Jeff Thomas (Canandaigua, NY/Canandaigua) ?? and a senior midfielder, Tony Gai (Burke, VA/Lake Braddock), who is sound defensively and on the attack. All three were Empire 8 all-stars in 2011 ?? Mannino and Thomas were Second Team picks and Gai earned honorable mention and will be counted on to provide leadership.

"We're going to expect a lot from Mannino and Thomas as far as contributing to the offense," Miller commented. Mannino had a team-leading 27 points on a team-best 12 goals to go with three assists; Thomas tallied 11 points on seven goals and a team-high four assists.

Sophomore Brendan Collins (Tompkins Cove, NY/St. Thomas More) tallied a goal as a freshman in 2011 and will see time at forward this year. A pair of newcomers freshmen Ian St. Pierre (Ann Arbor, MI/Dexter) and Nicholas Carey (Middletown, NY/Minisink Valley) will step in and contribute right away up front and could also see time at midfield.

Senior Eric Rockwood (Allegany, NY/Allegany-Limestone) and freshman Greg Buisman (Honeoye Falls, NY/Honeoye Falls-Lima) provide depth at the forward position.

“Our forward line is going to be good,” Miller commented. “We have some clinical technicians who are good at taking on defenders and finding the net.”

Offense will also come from the midfield, which will be led by Gai, a starter since his freshman season. Gai was third on the team in scoring with 11 points (four goals, three assists) and played solid defense.

“Tony is the gut of this team, a real leader,” Miller said. “He’s very versatile. He contributes going forward and is great on set pieces. And he does a great job controlling the middle of the field.”

Also providing scoring punch from the midfield will be sophomores Eric Deemer (Oneonta, NY/Oneonta) and Nicholas Milliman (Randolph, NY/Randolph). Deemer, who may also see time at forward, scored six points on a pair of goals and two assists last season. Milliman, who can also play forward, tallied a goal and assist as a freshman. Others slated to compete for time at midfield are sophomore Colby Cotton (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood) and freshmen Omar Mohamed (Rochester, NY/Edison) and Dylan Smith (Silver Spring, MD/Sandy Spring Friends). Freshman Phil Facquet (Farmingville, NY/Sachem East) provides depth at the midfield position.

“I think they will give us good control going forward,” Miller said of his midfield. “And they’re a disciplined group on the defensive side.”

AU will be strong on defense, with a pair of letterwinning defenders in juniors Zach Kranefeld (Millville, NJ/Millville) and Uriah Kashmann-Myrow (Warwick, NY/Warwick Valley) returning. In addition, junior Rigel Johnson (Little Valley, NY/Cattaraugus, NY/Little Valley), who saw time at forward and midfield his first two years (two goals and an assist as a starting midfielder in 2011), moves to defender this season.

“Rigel will be a leader on the back line,” Miller said of Johnson. “He’s very versatile and can play anywhere. He’ll give us some experience in the back.”

Kranefeld (14 games, four starts in 2011) “is a great ball-winner. His experience will be crucial,” Miller said. Kashmann-Myrow (eight games played last fall) “is a strong, vocal leader.”

Miller is excited about a group of freshmen who will step in and contribute immediately to the defense. They include Brian O’Hanlon (Schenectady, NY/Guilderland), Kevin Powers (Syracuse, NY/Cicero-North Syracuse), Nicholas Poindexter (Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, NY/Cornwall) and Wyatt Bush (Silver Springs, NY/Attica).

“All our freshmen (defenders) are quite good,” Miller said. “They’ll step right in and see time.”

For the first time in four seasons, there will be a new starting goalkeeper, as four are competing to replace four-year starter Elliott Thorpe in goal. They include junior keepers Jacob Bird (Auburn, NY/Skaneateles) and Sam Guy (Binghamton, NY/Binghamton) and freshmen William Badger (Dannemora, NY/Saranac) and Matthew Unick (Warwick, NY/Warwick Valley). Bird played in four games (one start) last year (91:34 of combined action) and made 11 saves while allowing no goals; Guy saw action in three games (68:44) and allowed two goals while making one save. Miller said any of the four could wind up starting this season.

“We have four good keepers who all bring something different to the table,” Miller said. “They’re all really pushing each other. It’s literally an open competition.

Miller said the depth of his team has brought out the best in all his players.

“We have the type of depth where anyone on our roster could start for us. It’s a good disciplined group who does things right and works well together,” said Miller, who is optimistic the Saxons can compete in the Empire 8 and push for a postseason berth.

“I think this group has the potential for the postseason,” he said. “And I think they know it. That makes a big difference.”