

Deep, experienced AU men's hoop team poised to compete for Empire 8 title

10/26/05

ALFRED, NY A deep and experienced Alfred University men's basketball team is ready to build on the success it enjoyed last year and make a run at the Empire 8 Conference crown in 2005-06. The Saxons (13-12, 7-7 Empire 8 a year ago) will have every starter back from a team that placed fifth in the Empire 8 standings, just out of the four-team conference championship tournament field. Only one letterwinner from a year ago, reserve guard Bruce Nober, was lost to graduation. The Saxons will be without their leading scorer for the first eight games. Senior shooting guard Quentin Bryant (Buffalo, NY/Seneca Vocational) has one semester of eligibility remaining and will rejoin the team Dec. 29 at the Case Western Tournament. Despite Bryant's absence, AU will still have plenty of talented and experienced players on the floor, most notably junior center Dillon Stein (North Huntingdon, PA/Norwin). A two-time Empire 8 Second Team all-star and the conference's Rookie of the Year in 2004, Stein will be counted on to carry much of the offensive load early in the year. He averaged 15 points and a team-leading 7.8 rebounds a year ago. "Dillon is very important to the team because he's our only big man," Murphy said of his 6-6 center. "He's one of the better players in the region. We'll need him to be a presence in the post in order to succeed." Murphy said Stein has improved his game each year he's been at AU. "He's hit the weights, his footwork is much better and he can attack the hoop with either hand. Sometimes he's too unselfish. What we need him to do is look to score first and pass second because that will open things up for our shooters." Other returning starters in the frontcourt include senior forward Ryan Hallett (Caledonia, NY/Caledonia-Mumford) and junior guard/forward Ryan Clemenson (Ovid, NY/South Seneca). Hallett, a good outside shooter, averaged 8.8 points and 3.2 rebounds last year. Clemenson, a solid defender (28 steals), was versatile on offense, scoring 7.2 points per contest to go with 5.6 boards and 36 assists. "(Hallett) has gotten a lot stronger. When he first came here, he was primarily a jump shooter. Now he can drive to the hoop. It presents challenges to defenses," Murphy said. "(Clemenson) has a complete game. He handles the ball well, can play any position and plays solid defense." Senior Todd Dersham (Campbell, NY/Campbell-Savona) performed well for AU in his first year after transferring from Keuka. After missing much of the first half of the season due to injury, Dersham scored 6.1 points per game (shooting 48 percent from the field and 80 percent from the line) and pulled down 1.9 rebounds per contest. "He gives us a lot of flexibility because he can hit the jumper or take it to the hole," Murphy said of Dersham. Adding depth to the frontcourt will be junior Mike McCarthy (Kinnelon, NJ/Kinnelon), sophomore Jared Hyatt (Newark, NY/Newark) and freshman Joel Bigelow (Ilion, NY/Ilion). The Saxons are solid in the backcourt. Junior point guard Rob McCarter (Wooster, OH/Wooster) returns, as does his backup from last year, senior Chris Lemasters (Mansfield, PA/Mansfield). McCarter was the Saxons' fourth-leading scorer last season, with 7.5 points per game. He also averaged 3.2 rebounds and dished out a team-high 52 assists. Lemasters, who was plagued all last year with an Achilles injury, was steady as a backup, averaging five points and 2.4 rebounds per game while handing out 49 assists. The two will likely both be in the starting lineup until Bryant returns to the team. "(Lemasters) is healthy now and is playing really well for us this year. He's a complete guard: he can drive to the hoop, stick the jumper and plays good defense" Murphy said. "(McCarter) handles the ball and passes well. He's a very smart player." Sophomore shooting guard Garlen Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland Area) played well as a freshman and is much improved this year. "He (Patt) is playing with a lot more confidence. Having him out there gives us a lot of depth at guard," Murphy said. When Bryant returns, AU will receive a huge boost on both ends of the court. A First Team All-Empire 8 selection a year ago, Bryant averaged 18.9 points while shooting 45 percent from the floor (39 percent on three-pointers) and 79.4 percent from the line. He averaged 3.5 rebounds and nearly two assists per game and led the team with 49 steals and 14 blocks. "He's a great player. He can score and will look to pass. He can shoot the jumper, but if you come out on him, he can go by you," Murphy said. Also competing for playing time at guard will be senior Seve Micheaux (Caledonia, NY/Caledonia-Mumford) sophomores Tom Cluckey (East Aurora, NY/East Aurora) and Anthony Ross (Ticonderoga, NY/Ticonderoga); and freshman Carl Embury (Perry, NY/Perry). The Saxons did a lot of things well as a team last year, which helped them improve on a 3-22 record from the season before. Field goal accuracy went from 40 percent in 2003-04 to 43 percent last season (with scoring up from 64 points in 2003-04 to 72 points per game last year) and the team cut its turnovers by close to 25 percent. "We want to see that trend continue, and with experience it should," Murphy said. "We also have to work harder defensively. Last year we gave up too many easy hoops." The Saxons have experience on their side, something Murphy hopes will translate into a willingness to do whatever it takes to win games. The team's primary goal is finishing in the top four in the Empire 8 and playing in the conference's

championship tournament, the winner of which earns a berth in the NCAA Division III playoffs."We need to finish stronger," Murphy said. "We can't be content to just show up. We need to maintain our work ethic. Our goal is to win 18, 20 games and be in the top four in the conference. It will take work, but we can do it."