

2002 Alfred University softball team blends of youth and experience

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ALFRED The Alfred University softball team enters the 2002 season with a new look that has many anxiously waiting the team's debut. This season's Saxons will be operating under first-year head coach Jaime McLaughlin. McLaughlin inherits a squad that will consist of eight returning players and nine newcomers. The 2001 Saxons finished with an overall record of 11-19 and an Empire 8 Conference record of 4-8. Despite the significant shifts in personnel, McLaughlin still sees a very competitive team that should produce both offensively and defensively. "We not only have offensive weapons in our arsenal, we also have the hardworking athletes that will get things done defensively too," said McLaughlin. Still, McLaughlin acknowledges the challenge that comes with replacing five starters, including several top hitters and the number one pitcher from last season. "With only four returning starters, the AU softball team has a lot of adjusting to do. There will be a lot of inexperience on the field," said McLaughlin. "But with the leadership of the upperclassmen, the newcomers are ready to face the challenge." Senior shortstop Tara Harwood (Hornell/Hornell) will return to the Saxon infield to lead the team with her strong bat and quick glove. Harwood batted .309 last season, including hitting a team-high three triples and three home runs, and drove in 13 runs. Harwood's quickness also allowed her to steal a team-high nine bases, while defensively aiding in 53 putouts and 104 assists. The only other Saxon returning to the infield is junior Melissa Wells (Broadalbin/Broadalbin-Perth), who will compete for time at second base with freshman Andrea Crandall (Almond/Alfred-Almond). Freshmen newcomers competing for time at third base include Kristina Goldberg (South Salem/John Jay), and Beth MacMichael (Scio/Scio). Freshmen Amanda Towner (Scio/Scio), and sophomore Wendy Breed (Macedon/Palmyra-Macedon) will share time at first base, while Rachel Porter (Hornell/Alfred-Almond) is expected to be utilized as a utility player. The AU outfield will consist of three returning players from last years' team. Patrolling the Saxon outfield will be sophomore Jacque Krycia (Hamburg/Mt. Mercy) and juniors Nikki Bell (Hinsdale/Hinsdale) and Jill Petrie (Wellsville/Scio). Bell batted .267 in 30 at bats last season and managed a .371 on-base percentage. Returning to lead the Saxon pitching rotation is junior Brandi Backus (Mt. Upton/Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton). As a sophomore, Backus pitched 96 1/3 innings and struck out 35 batters to produce a 6-6 record and a 3.49 ERA. As a hitter, Backus batted .340 and finished with an on-base percentage of .661. Newcomers set to join the Saxon rotation are freshman Beth Glotz (Youngsville, PA/Youngsville) and Kathryn Lee (Winthrop, WA/Liberty Bell). Sophomore Jackie Kreamer (South Dayton/Pine Valley) will be called upon to maintain catching duties for the Saxons this season. Kreamer recorded 38 putouts and seven assists in 15 games for the Saxons in 2001. Also expected to see time behind the plate is MacMichael, and freshman Amy Espowood (North Haven, CT/North Haven). Overall, McLaughlin is optimistic about her team's potential and is ready to accept the challenge that awaits her. "This team has a new spirit and a fresh outlook on the game," said McLaughlin. "There is no pressure on this team, but their expectations for themselves are high."