

Close to 100 report for Saxons preseason football camp

8/21/00

Alfred University welcomes nearly 100 to preseason football camp. ALFRED Alfred University's football team is gearing up for the 2000 campaign, with 98 players arriving on campus last week for the start of preseason camp. While it's an average preseason camp in terms of quantity, it's the quality of players that has head coach Dave Murray excited about the prospects for 2000. The preseason roster includes 18 returning starters, 27 returning lettermen and a number of talented newcomers. "This is the largest group of seniors we've had since I've been here," said Murray, now in his third year at the Saxons' helm. "They're quality kids and we expect great leadership from them." Preseason camp began Tuesday, Aug. 15, and will run through Thursday, Aug. 24. Murray and his staff are overseeing two-a-day practice sessions throughout camp, with morning sessions held at Merrill Field and afternoon sessions at the Jericho Hill practice fields. Practices are held around team and positional meetings with assistant coaches and running and weightlifting sessions. Murray is excited about the enthusiasm his players especially returning letterman have shown thus far. "That's the kind of attitude we need to have," Murray said. "The veterans know our expectations and goals making the NCAA playoffs and it shows in their work ethic. Plus, it rubs off on the new players." Experience will be key to the Saxons' chances of improving on last year's 6-4 mark. Alfred has eight starters returning on both offense and defense, along with both kickers and return specialists. The front seven on defense is especially talented, with two of three linebackers and three of four linemen returning from last year's starting unit. Four senior lettermen Aaron Rounds (Celoron/Southwestern), Brandon Falk (Eldred, PA/Otto-Eldred), Tom Phelan (Middletown/Chicopee) and Chris Vant (Red Creek/Liverpool-Canton) return at linebacker. Junior tackle Todd Strong (Deposit/Deposit) leads a defensive line that is bolstered by the return of end Brad Verbosky (Bemus Point/Maple Grove), who sat out the 1999 season. While the secondary lacks an experienced cover corner, three starters return, including senior All-America candidate and co-captain Brian Keefer (Jamestown/Maple Grove). "We'll need to find some speed in the secondary," Murray said. "One of the new guys could emerge and take on that role." There is depth at the offensive skill positions. Juniors Matt Gates (Cicero/Cicero-North Syracuse) and Todd Zandrowicz (East Aurora/East Aurora) platooned last year at quarterback and will be challenged this season by senior Matt Krenzer (Churchville/Churchville-Chili) and freshman Jon Davern (Canandaigua/Canandaigua), the 1999 Class A Player of the Year in New York State. Junior Jason Slagle (Celoron/Southwestern) leads a talented receiving corps and Murray has the luxury of playing two solid tailbacks, senior George Eason (Oswego/Oswego) and sophomore Jesse Raynor (Weedsport/Weedsport). Eason and Raynor are also dangerous on kickoff returns. "One area we need to improve is our offensive line play," said Murray. The line is anchored by senior guard Wes Choy (Orangeburg/Pearl River), a co-captain who has started since coming to Alfred in 1997. Zandrowicz will handle punting duties a year after finishing second in ECAC Upstate New York. Senior Ryan Rambacher (Bemus Point/Maple Grove) is a four-year starting placekicker. While the Saxons aren't short on experience, Murray stressed that no player's job is secure. "Athletic ability, work ethic, playmaking ability and coachability all come into play," he said. "These kids have 27 practices 27 chances to make an impression. Our best players will step onto the field, regardless of what class they're in." Murray has recruited a talented freshman class, which includes three All-State players from New York: Davern, offensive lineman Mike McGuire (Norwich/Norwich) and defensive back Ray Sawner (Sylvan Beach/Oneida). "We have some highly touted guys coming in," Murray said. "They'll push for playing time." Alfred opens its season with a rare night game Sept. 2 at home against St. John Fisher. Kickoff is at 7 p.m. Murray has upgraded the Saxons' schedule, adding tough contests against Ithaca (Sept. 9 at home) and Union (away, Sept. 30) to complement road games with traditional rivals St. Lawrence (Sept. 16), Hartwick (Oct. 14) and Hobart (Oct. 21).