

## **New coach hopes to continue success of AU women's volleyball team**

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ALFRED The Alfred University women's volleyball team faces the challenge of playing, for the first time in four years, without three of the best ever to wear the Lady Saxons' uniform. Lost to graduation last spring were Andrea Williamson, the school's career leader in kills, blocks and digs, and Beth Merrill and Kelly Johnston, who rank among the all-time leaders in kills and blocks, respectively. Last season, the Lady Saxons won 26 matches, including two of three at the state tournament, and played in the ECAC tournament, where they lost in the first round. Despite the losses of key players, first-year coach Damon Counterman has several key performers with a wealth of experience returning this season, including a trio of seniors setter Stephanie Sprague (Portville/Portville), defensive specialist Kathy Lembke (Tonawanda/Mount St. Mary) and outside hitter Janet Dalecki (Wading River/Shoreham-Wading River) who have seen significant playing time the last two seasons. Sprague, one of the best setters in the program's history, logged 930 assists last year and has 1,873 for her career. Lembke is the team's second leading returning server, with 40 aces last year. Dalecki had 181 kills, second among returners. Sophomore middle hitter Sara Beatty (Newark, DE/Christiana) will need to have an outstanding year for AU to succeed. Beatty had a solid freshman campaign, with 220 kills, tops among returning players, and was second in blocks with 114. Other key returnees include senior defensive specialists Mel Hepfer (Duke Center, PA/Otto-Eldred) (280 digs in 2000) and Nicole Wodka (Tonawanda/Cardinal O'Hara) (41 aces and 297 digs), senior outside hitters Allison Rieck (Walworth/Gananda) and Julie VanVechten (Canandaigua/Canandaigua), junior outside hitter Kathleen Machnik (Canandaigua/Canandaigua) and junior setter Erin Murray (Candor/Candor) (68 assists, second on team). Newcomers include juniors Laura Fortune (Tallahassee, FL/Leon) and Jill Culeton (Victor/Victor), sophomore Amanda Viscarra (Gasport/Royalton-Hartland), and freshmen Kathryn Lee (Winthrop, WA/Liberty Bell) and Lauren Fintak (East Aurora/Iroquois).