

AU men's soccer team determined to make run at postseason play

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ALFRED The disappointment of not receiving a playoff bid last season fresh in their minds, members of the Alfred University men's soccer team are determined to make a run at postseason play this season. Alfred returns 11 letterwinners, five of them starters, from a squad that went 12-1-2 last season, setting schools season records for most goals scored and least goals allowed. But despite going unbeaten and unscored upon in Empire 8 conference play, the Saxons lost the conference tiebreaker to determine the NCAA qualifier. RIT, which AU played to a 0-0 draw, went to the NCAA tournament instead. This year, the Empire 8 will hold a year-end tournament to determine the conference's NCAA qualifier. The top four teams in the conference standings will play off, with the winner earning the bid. AU head coach Ken Hassler said his squad's goal is to be one of those four teams. "Our goal, as always, is to make the NCAAs," Hassler said. "With the Empire 8 tournament at the end of the year, our first goal is to be one of the top seeds," While the Saxons lost several key players from last season, most notably forward Guy-Robert Desir, midfielder Jon Bridges and defender Scott Wallace, Hassler has a number of top players from last year's team returning, each of them determined to make the NCAA field. Combined with a crop of promising newcomers, they have reason to be optimistic. "So far, we don't have the same depth we had last season, but that could change depending how our younger players develop and adjust to the collegiate game," Hassler said. Alfred is led by senior forward/midfielder and captain Karl Gnann, the team's leading scorer last season with 23 points (8G, 7A) and a first team all-conference selection. Gnann possesses a hard and accurate shot and will be asked to play midfield at times. Helping Gnann on the attack will be fellow senior Andy Gennarini, who returns to the lineup after missing last season with an injury. Also manning the front line will be junior Keith Phelan and sophomore Stephen Robin. Phelan returns after missing last season. As a freshman in 2000, he had four goals and an assist. Robin, who will also play midfield, scored a pair of goals as a freshman last season. Freshmen adding depth to the forward position are Austin Lozier and Anes Osmic. At midfield, Hassler is counting on senior Shane Donahoe, junior Andy Kernahan and freshman Adam Morgan. Donahoe had 17 points (8G, 1A) on his way to being named second team all-conference, while Kernahan had three goals and a pair of assists. Morgan is a "smooth technical player and great distributor of the ball," Hassler said. Also vying for time at the midfield position will be junior Ian Hoffman, sophomore Mike DeLorenzo and freshmen Skylar Pais, Justin Gillan and John Ninos. An experienced defense includes seniors Pat Mancini, a four-year starter, Dale Owen and Jim Carroll, along with sophomores Brian Donahoe and Randy Clukey. Clukey, Mancini and Owen were starters last season, while Donahoe will be expected to take over a starting role this year. Senior goalie Kevin Ball returns after a spectacular junior year in which he posted a .36 goals against average and nine shutouts. Ball was a second team all-conference and Regional All-American last year. Adding depth to the backfield will be freshmen defenders Tim Hasselberg, Adam Wentlet and Alex Karp, while freshman William Brown will back Ball up in goal. Hassler said he and the team are optimistic about continued success this year and the Saxons' chances of making a successful run to the postseason.