

Men's basketball team off to best start in 15 seasons

12/20/00

ALFRED — The Alfred University men's basketball team is off to its best start in 15 years. Entering the mid-season break the Saxons have accumulated an overall record of 7-1, 1-0 in Empire Eight competition. Not since the 1985-86 season has an Alfred team opened a season with greater dominance. The 1985-86 team won its first nine games and finished with a 25-3 overall record, losing in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The following year's squad opened 7-1 en route to a 17-10 finish. The Saxons kicked off the season by winning the NYU tournament title in New York City. Alfred defeated Middlebury in first round competition before downing host NYU in the championship game. After victories over Cazenovia and Allegheny, and Westfield State in the first round of the Williams (MA) College Tournament, AU suffered its only loss thus far this season in the championship game of the Williams Tournament, where the Saxons lost in overtime to the host team. The Saxons closed out the season's first half with victories over Empire Eight foe St. John Fisher and St. Lawrence. The Saxons have enjoyed a successful start to their season despite the absence of senior point guard Willie Smith (Fulton/Fulton), who has missed the first half of the season with a nagging back injury. Smith, who was third in scoring for AU last season and was among the Empire Eight leaders in assists, steals and free throw percentage, is expected to return in January. Filling in at the point for Smith, and returning to Saxon basketball after a two-year hiatus, is junior guard Devon Downing (Canton, OH/Glenoak). Downing's return has been nothing less than spectacular as the point guard leads the team in scoring with 21.1 points per game, while contributing 6.3 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.6 steals per contest. Also new to the Saxon lineup is senior forward Brock Stortini (Amenia/Arlington). Stortini, a transfer, is averaging a double-double with 10.7 points and a team-high 10.5 rebounds per contest. Junior forward E.J. Docteur (Seneca Falls/Mynderse Academy) is having a big year with 17.5 points and 4.9 rebounds a game, while senior center Kareem McKinnon (Brooklyn/Kingsborough) has been consistent with 8.7 points and 6.9 boards per game. McKinnon also broke the Alfred record for career blocks after tallying two rejections in the Saxon's second game of the season. McKinnon had entered his senior year with 131 career blocks, tied with former Saxon Mike Wing. The Saxons look to continue their winning ways on January 5 and 6, when the team hosts Empire Eight rivals Nazareth and RIT, respectively. Much is on the line for Alfred in the season's second half. Of the team's 16 remaining contests, 13 are against conference opponents. The team with the best conference record wins an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. The last time AU participated in the NCAAs was in 1989.