

## Balanced Saxons look to claim team's first-ever Empire 8 title

7/31/09



ALFRED, NY Strong on both sides of the ball and on special teams, the Alfred University football team is poised to compete for the program's first-ever Empire 8 championship. The Saxons, who went 7-4 last season and tied for second place in the Empire 8 with a 4-2 conference mark, return most players from an explosive offense that averaged 380 yards per game and helped scored nearly 30 points per contest. While the defense lost several key performers from a unit that allowed 20 points and just over 100 yards rushing per contest, a solid core of starters return. The AU offense will present a balanced attack, led by sophomore quarterback and reining Empire 8 Rookie of the Year Tom Secky (Bemus Point, NY/Maple Grove), senior wide receiver Jared Manzer (Johnson City, NY/Johnson City) and senior tailback Vinson Hendrix (Rochester, NY/East). Secky set new AU freshman passing records with 2,869 yards passing and 27 touchdown passes and he established a new single-game record with 387 passing yards against Ursinus in his AU debut. While Secky will miss two-time all-conference wideout Trevor Bork, who graduated, he has a more than capable target in Manzer, a record-setting receiving and three-time all-conference selection. Manzer last season set single-season records for catches (69) and receiving yards (1,058) and tied his own season record for touchdown catches with 10 and entering his senior season is poised to break most school career receiving marks. Perhaps most encouraging to Saxons' head coach Dave Murray will be the return of a healthy Hendrix. A 2007 Empire 8 First Team all-star, when he set a new school single-season rushing record with 1,406 yards, Hendrix was hampered by injury throughout the 2008 campaign and despite scoring a team-best 10 touchdowns, was limited to 415 yards on 136 carries. If Hendrix can return to form, AU's offense could rival that of the record-setting 2007 squad, which averaged 453 yards per game while scoring 37.5 points per contest. Bork wasn't the only starter lost to graduation. Two-year-starting fullback Jeff Pecoraro and tailback Morgan O'Brien (who shared carries with Hendrix and earned Second Team Empire 8 honors) are also gone. Still, there are plenty of talented players ready to step into their shoes. Senior wideout Milton Harding (Binghamton, NY/Johnson City) and junior wideout Ryan Thon (Victor, NY/Victor) are expected to join Manzer in the Saxons' three-receiver sets. As the third receiver last year, Harding caught 29 passes for 330 yards and three scores, while Thon saw limited action and caught four balls for 80 yards and a score. Senior Don Podlish (Rochester, NY/Irondequoit) is slated to take over for Pecoraro at fullback. The offensive line returns almost entirely intact, led by a pair of 2008 Second Team Empire 8 all-stars in senior left tackle Dave Carletta (Webster, NY/Webster Schroeder) and junior right tackle Zach Morgan (Homer, NY/Homer). Other returning starters from the line are senior right guard Eric Manning (Hoosick Falls, NY/Hoosick Falls) and junior center Jeff VanDewalker (Raleigh, NC/Cicero-North Syracuse). The offensive line and passing game is bolstered by talented junior tight end D.J. Loughlin-Pope (Corning, NY/Corning East). In his first season as starter last year, Loughlin-Pope caught 11 passes for 193 yards and four touchdowns and was named a Second Team conference all-star. The AU defense lost several key players to graduation, but with its depth is set to be strong again in 2009. The return of linebacker Chad Pieri (LeRoy, NY/Caledonia-Mumford) gives Alfred one of the strongest linebacking groups in the region. Pieri, a junior who missed the 2008 season with an injury, had a combined 163 tackles (19 for loss, 11 sacks) his first two years. He joins sophomore Nick Clark (Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood) and senior Marc Mangovski (Kirkville, NY/East Syracuse-Minoa) as starting linebackers. Clark enjoyed a tremendous freshman campaign in 2008, leading the team in tackles (88) and leading the team and conference in tackles for loss (22) and sacks (eight) en route to being named a

Second Team conference pick. Mangovski, an honorable mention Empire 8 all-star, was second on the team with 70 tackles and had 5.5 tackles for loss and three sacks to go with a team-best three fumble recoveries. Sophomore Wes Smith (Turbotville, PA/Muncy) will be a key member of the linebacking corps. As a freshman, he had 21 tackles in nine games. The defensive line lost a pair of starters to graduation First Team all-Empire 8 tackle Rob Ritter and end Dan Dunham who combined for 100 tackles (nine for loss) and a pair of sacks, but returns a trio of linemen who played very well in 2008. They include senior end Adam Brockway (New Hartford, NY/New Hartford), sophomore end Marcellus Jones (Lancaster, NY/Lancaster) and senior tackle Jerry Bond (Watkins Glen, NY/Watkins Glen). Brockway had 48 tackles and was second on the team in tackles for loss (6.5) and sacks (five). Jones had 25 tackles, including 3.5 for loss and two sacks, while Bond added 25 tackles, including five for loss and a sack. The defensive backfield was hit hard by graduation, as all four starters (three of them all-conference picks in 2008) were lost. They include four-time conference all-star and 2008 First Team pick, free safety Brian Nitsche, and 2008 Second Team pick, cornerback Ron Smith. The pair tied for the team lead in interceptions with five each. Also lost were strong safety Jeremy Darron, an honorable mention Empire 8 selection last year, and two-year starting cornerback Matt Van Woeart. Backups from last year vying for a starting role in the defensive backfield include sophomore free safety Ryan Quinliven (Endicott, NY/Union-Endicott), junior safety Matt Mazur (Marcy, NY/Whitesboro), junior cornerback Roland O'Brien (Hoosick Falls, NY/Hoosick Falls), and senior safety Nick Barton (South Glens Falls, NY/South Glens Falls). Special teams will again be a strength for the Saxons. While AU will miss Bork's contributions (he averaged 18.3 yards and 134.1 yards, respectively, on kickoff and punt returns last year), Manzer (17.6 yards on kickoffs; 10.5 yards on punts) is always a threat to break a long return. Thon and Hendrix are candidates to return kicks in 2009. Sophomore placekicker Eric Rockwood (Allegany, NY/Allegany-Limestone) will try to follow up a fine freshman campaign in which he made 31 of 36 PATs and nine of 13 field goal attempts. Senior punter Pete Marley (Warsaw, NY/Warsaw) was an honorable mention Empire 8 all-star after averaging 36.7 yards per punt last season. Alfred opens its season Saturday, Sept. 5 at University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth. After another non-conference road game the following Saturday, Sept. 12, at FDU-Florham, the Saxons play their home opener on Sept. 19 against St. Lawrence (Homecoming). AU entertains Springfield in its Empire 8 opener on Sept. 26 and after a bye week, hosts Empire 8 rival Hartwick on Oct. 10. Alfred is idle the following weekend before resuming play on Oct. 24 at Empire 8 foe St. John Fisher. A home game Oct. 31 against non-conference opponent Rochester is followed by a conference game at Ithaca Nov. 7. The Saxons wrap up the regular season Nov. 14 at home against Empire 8 opponent Utica.