

Alfred University men's lacrosse team lays foundation for continued success

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ALFRED After two losing seasons, the seniors on the 2002 Alfred University men's lacrosse team were intent on reversing their fortunes. The Saxons accomplished that goal, logging an 8-5 record (the team's best in five years) and finishing in the top half of the Empire 8 conference. While the team loses some exceptional players to graduation, many will return in 2003 hoping to build on the foundation of winning created this season. "I thought our young men worked extremely hard," head coach Preston Chapman said. "They weren't satisfied with the previous three years and went out and did something about it." Indeed, seniors from this year's squad had endured some rough times throughout their careers, going a combined 15-25 the previous three seasons. The Saxons started out on fire, winning their first four games, including a 14-13 upset of then No. 4 ranked Ohio Wesleyan. After stumbling in its next two games (losses to Clarkson in the Terrence O'Connor Tournament finals and then to nationally-ranked Hartwick), AU rebounded to knock off St. John Fisher and then RIT in double overtime. After dropping their next three games to Geneseo, Ithaca and Nazareth (all ranked nationally at the time), Alfred closed out the season with victories over Utica and Elmira. Alfred's 8-5 record (3-3 in Empire 8) was its best since the 1997 team went 10-4 and made the NCAA Division III playoffs. The Saxons' main goal, as always, was to earn a bid to play in the postseason. That didn't happen, although AU was under consideration for the ECAC Upstate NY tournament. AU did accomplish several of the team goals set in the preseason: improving the face-off and clear percentages; sustaining longer attacks; and increasing scoring while decreasing goals allowed. Penalties hurt the team at times, but Chapman believes that as his younger players mature, the number of penalties will go down. The Saxons outscored their opponents, 172-121, with a trio of sophomore attackmen leading the scoring parade. David Vail (Mt. Lakes, NJ/Mt. Lakes) led the team in scoring with 66 points (33G, 33A). In only two years, Vail is already in the top 10 in career assists as well as single-season scoring and assists. He was named an Empire 8 Second Team all star this year. Dylan Macro (Camillus/West Genesee), an honorable mention all-Empire 8 selection and the Saxons' Offensive MVP this year, was the team's leading goal scorer with 34 and was second in scoring with 49 points (34G, 15A). Trevor Archer (Penn Yan/Penn Yan) was third in scoring with 31 points (18G, 13A). Other returnees on attack include freshmen Angus Graham (Bethel, ME/Gould Academy) and Garrett Anders-Lauten (Waterford, VA/Louden). Senior Adam Gardner (Syracuse/Henninger) is the only attackman lost to graduation. He had eight goals and assisted on three this season. The midfield loses the most players to graduation. Wrapping up solid careers this season were seniors Bryan Bacon (Homer/Homer), who had 16 points (12G, 4A); Rob Strickland (Amherst/Sweet Home), 21 points (9G, 12A) to go with 61 ground balls (second in the team); and Bill Crehan (Buffalo/Bishop Timon), 14 points (5G, 9A). Strickland was awarded the Lt. Kevin Flaherty Award, given by the team for exhibiting leadership and character. "We lose some great leaders (from the midfield)," Chapman said. "It may not show up in the scoring column, but they helped greatly in controlling the game on both ends of the field." While midfield will be the focus of recruiting efforts for next year, the Saxons do return three solid midfielders, led by junior Steve Douglas (Horseheads/Horseheads), an honorable mention all-Empire 8 selection. In his first year after transferring to AU, the former junior college All-America was fourth on the team in scoring with 21 points (19G, 2A). He also played solid defense, grabbing a team-high 70 groundballs. Perhaps as important was his effectiveness on face-offs. Douglas won 60 percent of his draws as the Saxons improved from a 44 percent face-off winning percentage in 2001 to 55 percent this year. Juniors Frank Radell (Henrietta/Rush Henrietta) and Greg Gascon (Buffalo/Bishop Timon) and sophomore Anthony Fiorelli (Endicott/Union-Endicott) also return to the midfield position in 2003. Radell won 53 percent of his face-offs, scooped 47 groundballs (third on the team) and had nine points (6G, 3A). Fiorelli was tied for sixth on the team in scoring with 16 points (12G, 4A) and picked up 25 ground balls. Gascon, who had seven goals and three assists, will be expected to pick up more of the scoring load next season. The Saxons suffer some key losses on defense, most notably that of long stick midfielder Steve Scanapieco (Mohegan Lake/Lakeland-Panas). Scanapieco started all 13 games and came up with 44 ground balls. He also scored two goals and had an assist. "Steve was outstanding from start to finish," Chapman said. "We could always count on him to control the opponent's best scorer and he was a leader. He'll be a big loss." AU also loses senior defenders Andrew Reeve (Penn Yan/Penn Yan), Marc Frechette (Whitney Point/Whitney Point), Ranjit Janhardhanan (Scarsdale/Iona Prep) and Tony Douglas (Horseheads/Horseheads). Douglas, the older brother of Steve Douglas, started all season, grabbing 30 groundballs, while Reeve, Frechette and Janardhanan were solid reserves. Despite the losses on defense, AU will return juniors Adam Jwaskiewicz (Liverpool/Liverpool) and Jeff Podolak

(Owasco/Skaneateles). Jwaskiewicz started 12 games and scooped 19 groundballs on his way to being named an honorable mention all-Empire 8 selection, while Podolak started in nine and had nine groundballs. Other defenders returning next season include juniors Chris Sgouris (Marietta/Marcellus) and Pat Wayne (Skaneateles/Skaneateles) and freshman Josh Parker (Hamburg/Hamburg). Perhaps the toughest shoes to fill will be those of graduating senior goalie Kevin Kazmierczak (West Seneca/Orchard Park), the team's Defensive MVP. The honorable mention all-Empire 8 selection posted a school-record 35 saves in the victory at RIT and was named national Division III Player of the Week by Inside Lacrosse magazine for his efforts. He posted a .615 save percentage and a 10.29 goals against average while starting all 13 games. "He had an outstanding senior year," Chapman said. "We'll miss him." Chapman feels he does have a capable goalie coming in next year. Kazmierczak's backup, freshman Nicholas Hohman (Gibsonia, PA/Pine-Richland) saw action in six games this year and had a .677 save percentage and 4.32 goals against average. "He's going to be solid," Chapman said of Hohman. "He has the potential to be a real good one." Looking ahead to next year, Chapman is optimistic the team's scoring output will increase even more, given that the team's top four scorers, including all three starting attackmen, return. The team possesses a solid defense and promising young goalie, and if the midfield comes together, the Saxons' could enjoy continued improvement and success. "The guys returning next year got a taste of what it's like to win and play near the top level," Chapman said. "That will motivate them to play even harder." Alfred plays in one of the toughest conferences in all of Division III, with the Empire 8 counting Division III powerhouses Nazareth, RIT, Ithaca and Hartwick among its membership. The Saxons have always played a challenging schedule, both in and out of conference, and next season will be no different. "Our goal of making it to the (NCAA) tournament is unchanged," Chapman said. "We think the playoffs are a good possibility next year."