

## Saxons fall at Ithaca, 31-10

11/07/09



ALFRED, NY The Alfred University football team lost a chance to clinch the team's first NCAA playoff appearance in 28 years with a 31-10 loss at Ithaca Saturday afternoon. Ithaca quarterback Brian Grastorf threw for 254 yards and four touchdowns and Bomber tailback Dan Ruggiero ran for 116 yards as the 14th-ranked Saxons lost for the 12th straight time at Ithaca. AU (7-1, 3-1 Empire 8) can still win a share of the Empire 8 Conference title, and the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Division III championship tournament, with a win in the regular season finale against next Saturday, Nov. 14, at 1 p.m. at Merrill Field. After a scoreless first quarter, Ithaca (6-3, 3-2 Empire 8) got on the board when Grastorf hit wide receiver Matthew Hannon with a 34-yard touchdown pass 2:06 into the second to cap a 13-play, 80-yard drive. A 23-yard field goal by Andrew Rogowski gave the Bombers a 10-0 lead with 9:35 left in the half. Alfred cut its deficit to a touchdown when sophomore Eric Rockwood (Allegany, NY/Allegany-Limestone) booted a 22-yard field goal with 2:19 left. The field goal came after AU failed to score on two tries from the Bomber three-yard line. Ithaca answered right back, taking the ensuing kickoff and driving 66 yards and four plays, taking a 17-3 lead at the half on 20-yard scoring pass from Grastorf to wideout Brian Vossler with 43 seconds left. AU senior tailback Vinson Hendrix (Rochester, NY/East), the nation's fourth-leading rusher coming in at just under 150 yards per game, was held to 38 yards in the first half. But Hendrix rebounded on the opening possession of the third, rushing for 41 yards on five carries as the Saxons drove to Ithaca 8-yard line. On third-and-goal from the Bomber 5-yard line, AU sophomore quarterback Tom Secky (Bemus Point, NY/Maple Grove) connected with senior wideout Milton Harding (Binghamton, NY/Johnson City) in the back of the endzone. The touchdown was wiped out on an illegal forward pass penalty and Rockwood's 26-yard field goal attempt hit the goalpost. The teams exchanged punts on their next possessions before Ithaca took a 24-3 lead on Grastorf's 14-yard TD pass to wideout Joseph Ingrao with 16 seconds left in the third, capping a 10-play, 80-yard drive. AU responded on its next possession, driving 63 yards in seven plays, with Secky throwing a seven-yard scoring pass to senior wideout/free safety Jared Manzer (Johnson City, NY/Johnson City) to make it 24-10 with 13:14 left in the game. Ithaca went back up by three touchdowns, driving 58 yards in six plays, with Grastorf tossing his fourth TD pass of the game, a nine-yard strike to Vossler with 9:06 left. On Alfred's ensuing possession, AU drove to the Ithaca 26 before Secky was intercepted at the Ithaca 1-yard line by Bomber strong safety David Ahonan. After forcing Ithaca to punt, the Bombers retained possession with a roughing the kicker penalty on Alfred with 4:24 left and effectively ran out the clock. Hendrix finished with 110 yards rushing on 23 carries and Secky completed 21 of 32 passes for 218 yards, a touchdown and an interception. Manzer caught nine passes for 101 yards and a score and junior wideout Ryan Thon (Victor, NY/Victor) caught seven for 62 yards. Freshman tailback Chris Lopez (Pittsford, NY/Rochester, NY/Pittsford Sutherland) had a 62-yard run on the game's final play. Grastorf completed 18 of 30 passes and was intercepted once. Vossler (87 yards and two touchdowns) and wide receiver Dan Ruffrage (83 yards) each caught five passes. Ithaca outgained AU 398 yards to 379 and had 19 first downs to Alfred's 18. Alfred converted five of 11 third down opportunities, while Ithaca made seven of 14 third down tries. The Bombers scored all four times they entered the red zone (three touchdowns and a field goal), while Alfred converted two of three red zone opportunities (touchdown and field goal). Senior linebacker Marc Mangovski (Kirkville, NY/East Syracuse-Minoa) led the AU defense with 10 tackles and sophomore cornerback Alec Currier (Peru, NY/Peru) had nine. Manzer had three tackles and an interception and sophomore linebacker Nick Clark

(Canisteo, NY/Canisteo-Greenwood) had eight tackles. Linebacker Ryan Clarke had a game-high 15 tackles (two for loss) for Ithaca. Linebacker Joe Gilfedder had nine stops, including 1.5 for loss, and end Owen Kugler had four solo tackles and a sack. If AU can beat visiting Utica next Saturday, the Saxons will earn the school's first NCAA bid since the 1981 team went 10-0 in the regular season before losing its first-round game to Montclair State. The last time AU won in Ithaca was 1982, when the Saxons claimed a 20-7 victory.