

AU volleyball team set to improve in 2004

8/31/04

ALFRED Over the last two seasons, the Alfred University women's volleyball team has endured the struggles and growing pains that come with youth and inexperience. And while this year's squad is still young (there are no seniors on the 2004 roster), it isn't lacking in experience and talent, which has first-year head coach Kathy Lembke excited about the Lady Saxons' chances for success. "One of our expectations this year is to win half our matches," said Lembke, a 2002 AU graduate and a three-year letterwinning defensive specialist for the Lady Saxons. That may seem to be a modest goal, but it would be a marked improvement over the 5-25 record from a year ago. Some talented veterans will lead the Lady Saxons this year. Junior outside hitter Beth Sanger (Greece/Greece Athena) is the top returnee. She was given honorable mention by the Empire 8 Conference in 2003 after leading AU in kills (319), digs (319) and blocks (50). She ranked sixth in the conference with 3.13 kills per game. "We're expecting big things from her," Lembke said. "Her skills have continued to improve and her hitting has gotten a lot stronger." Other returning starters for Alfred are junior setter Deen Genzardi (Oneonta/Unatego) and junior outside hitter Catherine Rieck (Walworth/Gananda). Genzardi had a team-high 495 assists last year; Rieck was second on the team with 218 kills while adding 184 digs. "Catherine worked very hard over the summer. She's probably the most fundamentally sound player on the team and she's a good leader," Lembke said. "Deen is very smart and athletic and sees the court well." Other key returnees include sophomore middle hitter Sarah Berry (Mora, MN/Mora) and sophomore outside hitter Tracy Haskell (Manhattan Beach, CA/Midland School). Berry had 113 kills as a freshman (third on the team) to go with 34 blocks, while Haskell had 65 kills and 94 digs. "They've been tossed around a bit," Lembke said of the struggles her returning players have encountered the last two years. "But having played through it, they can lead the rest of the team and take some of the pressure off our younger players." A solid group of newcomers join the team, and they'll be expected to contribute right away. Sophomores Lauren LeComte (Wolcott, CT/Wolcott) and Sarah Donohue (Central Square/Paul V. Moore) are expected to start at defensive specialist and middle hitter, respectively. Neither played as freshman. "Lauren is very quick and she can play tough defense," Lembke said. "Sarah is very athletic and will be solid on her blocks." Freshman outside hitter Stephanie Troiano (Clifton Park/Shenendehowa) could start on the outside. "She's a strong hitter and we expect her to continue to improve and be a big part of the team," Lembke commented. Other newcomers who will add depth to the squad are sophomore defensive specialist-setter Sandy Yuen (Brooklyn/Midwood), freshman outside hitter Nicole Perry (Whitesboro/Whitesboro), freshman setter Leah Fredericks (Chardon, OH/The Andrews School) and freshman defensive specialist Annie Chih (Queens/Townsend Harris). Lembke is encouraged by the depth and talent on her young team and expects them to show continued improvement throughout the season. "I can have any one of the girls step in and play well," she said. "If we continue to show a lot of hard work, dedication and team unity, we'll achieve our goals."