

## AU football team brings wealth of talent, experience to 2002 campaign

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ALFRED The 2001 season was one of growing pains for the Alfred University football team, which suffered huge losses on both sides of the ball from the previous year. As a result, a largely young and inexperienced squad struggled to a 4-5 record. But the 2002 campaign brings with it renewed optimism. Sixteen of 22 starters return, including 10 of 11 on defense. Many of those players saw their first significant game action last year and began the season slow. But they steadily gained experience, which head coach Dave Murray expects will carry over into this season. "We're looking for improvement, especially on defense," Murray said. "We played a lot of young kids, particularly in the secondary, last season. We'll have a lot more experience this fall." Indeed, the Saxons began last season with eight new starters on defense. The entire linebacking corps and secondary was made up of first-year starters and the inexperience showed as opposing offenses put up big passing numbers. By the end of the year, however, the defense had settled in and was holding its own. While the Saxons did lose star nose guard Todd Strong to graduation, several solid veterans and a host of promising newcomers return. "We feel our secondary is much improved this year," Murray said. "We had two freshmen starting at safety, and one of our cornerbacks (converted wideout Vinnie Adamo) was playing his first season on defense. Our linebackers were young and inexperienced last year, but now we feel that group is very solid. Our line is the strength of our defense. We lost (Strong), but have some talented guys returning." The offense was hit harder by graduation: five first-stringers, including four-year starting quarterback Todd Zandrowicz, will be replaced this year. The good news is record-breaking senior tailback Jesse Raynor (Weedsport/Weedsport), along with four of five starting linemen, return. Murray said his squad will rely heavily on a running game that produced more than 200 yards on the ground last year. "The most important unit on the field is the offensive line, because they have the ability to control the football game," Murray said. "The offensive line we have this season is the best I've had in my five years here." The running game will be expected to carry the team until the passing game is established. Alfred will have first-year starters at quarterback, tight end, fullback and one of the receiving positions. "Ideally, we'd like to run the ball sixty percent of the time," Murray said. "We want to control the flow of the game. We're a strong, physical team and we need to control the ball and wear teams down." The Saxons must get out of the blocks fast, Murray said, and avoid the slow start of a year ago, when the team dropped four of its first five games and was out of contention for the postseason play by mid-year. The Saxons again face a challenging slate of games, including dates against perennial Division III powers Ithaca and Union and with longtime rivals Hobart and Hartwick. "We want to get off to a great start. The first game (home against St. John Fisher) is crucial," he said. "Our goal, as always, is to make the postseason. We feel like we've been close, now we just need to get over the hump. We've been competitive, but this is the year we can take the next step, get to 7-3 or 8-2 and get into the playoffs." "We have experience and leadership all around. That's going to be a big help." Here's a look at the 2002 Saxons: OFFENSE: Murray said the team's primary offensive strength, the running attack, will be emphasized, particularly early in the season, as the coaching staff works to get the passing game on track. Fortunately, the Saxon's have a wealth of experience and talent in the offensive backfield, led by Raynor, one of three team captains this year. Raynor enters his senior campaign needing 1,151 yards to break former Saxon Ray Rogers' career rushing mark of 3,506 yards. Raynor has been a workhorse in the backfield the last two years, leading the team in rushing, carries and receptions. Last year he also held placekicking duties and finished the year having scored 102 points, the second-highest single-season total in school history. "Jesse is bigger and stronger this year than at any point in his career," Murray said. "He's a tremendous leader, and one of the best tailbacks this school has ever had." Raynor will have company, as two talented tailbacks return. Sophomore Anthony Pollizi (Hornell/Hornell) had a solid freshman year as Raynor's backup, and coaches expect big things out of freshman Brenton Brady (Rochester/Marshall), who missed all of last year with a knee injury suffered in training camp. Murray said he expects all three will see significant playing time this fall. Luke Whitteker (Mansfield, PA/Elmira Notre Dame), a freshman, will also compete for time at the tailback position. Junior Chris Gutmann (Rochester/Aquinas), classmate Ryan Sutphen (Glens Falls/Glens Falls), a converted safety, and junior Mike Chambers (Ogdensburg, NY/Ogdensburg Free Academy), a transfer from St. Lawrence, will compete for the starting fullback position. The biggest unknown on offense will be at quarterback. Murray said sophomore Ron Duliba (Forestville/Forestville), who took only five snaps last year, and freshman Joe Guiliano (Farmingville/Sachem), will compete for the starting nod. "Quarterback is our biggest question mark," Murray said. "It's wide open." Speedy junior Nick Coleman (Waverly/Waverly), who started much of last season, and sophomore Jake Sprague (Johnsonburg, PA/Johnsonburg), are the only receivers with any

experience. Also competing for time at receiver will be sophomores Carlos Guzman (New York/Manhattan Center) and Antonio Williams (Rochester/Hilton) and freshman Shay Nelson (Hamburg/Hamburg). The Saxons will also have a new starting tight end, with junior Pat Bell (Bow, NH/Bow) and sophomores Kalen Fitch (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway), Jeff Dillon (Wading River/Shoreham-Wading River) and Bill Battaglia (Cheektowaga/Cheektowaga) competing for the job. The offensive line is big, strong and experienced. While the squad did lose all-star tackle Dan Herrling, it does return four starters: sophomore left tackle Josh Skinner (Seneca Falls/Mynderse), senior left guard Steve Price (Syracuse/Henninger), senior center Larry Rossi (Hyde Park/FDR) and junior right guard Sean Gollnitz (Fredonia/Fredonia). Senior Russ Myers (Ridgway, PA/Ridgway), a starter his freshman and sophomore years, is set to take over at right tackle. The team has a group of solid backup linemen, including sophomores Anthony Catoggio (Glens Falls/Glens Falls), Ben Wiley (Sherrill/Vernon-Verona-Sherrill) and Jordan Schmidt (Wheatfield/Niagara-Wheatfield) and freshmen Charles Bonafede (Rochester/Greece Athena) and Michael Levato (Pittsford/Pittsford-Sutherland).

**DEFENSE:** The defensive line has a lot to make up for with the loss of Strong, the team leader in tackles last year, but several solid players return, including senior tackle Pete Gaydon (Muncy, PA/Muncy), a three-year starter, and senior end Nick Luther (Westfield/Westfield), a two-year starter. Senior ends Dave Murello (Clifton Park/Shenendehowa) and Dan Raynor (Maple Grove/Maple Grove) have both seen significant playing time over the last two seasons and will be expected to contribute heavily this year. Junior tackle Doug Mueller (Bainbridge/Bainbridge-Guilford), sophomore nose guard Louie Pereira (Rochester/Greece-Athena), sophomore tackle Nate Reid (Norwich/Norwich-Valley Forge), and freshmen Chris Dennison (Elmira Heights/Thomas Edison) and Chris Mayotte (Syracuse/Onondaga) will also compete for playing time on the defensive line. Three starting linebackers return. Senior tri-captains Will Till (Forestville/Forestville) and Colin Murphy (Manchester, NH/Central) (56 tackles, two interceptions in 2001), and junior Erich Ely (Jordan/Jordan-Elbridge) each ranked in the top 10 in tackles last season. Ely is the Saxons' top returning tackler: he had 61 stops last year, including eight for losses and three sacks. Sophomores Justin Krasa (Titusville/Canandaigua) and Steve Hawryschuk (Seneca Falls/Mynderse) are solid backups who should see significant playing time. Junior Vinnie Adamo (Fayetteville/Fayetteville-Manlius) and senior Gabe Bouthillier (Bridgeport/Cicero-North Syracuse) return as the starting cornerbacks. Both showed marked improvement over the course of last year, their first season as starters, with Bouthillier showing a knack for making big plays. He had a team-high three interceptions and a fumble recovery. Sophomore free safety Mike Wright (Grand Valley, PA/Titusville) picked off two passes, while sophomore strong safety Joe Pereira (Rochester/Greece-Athena) had 28 tackles, including nine for losses and three sacks. The secondary receives a big boost with the return of sophomore free safety Mark Smith (Corning/Corning East), a starter four years ago as a freshman. Sophomore cornerback Dan Occena (Spring Valley/Spring Valley) and sophomore safety Kiel Liddell (Bemus Point/Maple Grove) will compete for playing time as well.

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Murray hopes a solid placekicker will emerge to take over for Jesse Raynor, who booted four field goals and 10 extra points last year while also handing kickoff duties. Freshmen Pat Breuer (Penn Yan/Penn Yan), Steve Whitmore (Groton/Groton) and James Horan (Plainview/JFK-Plainview) will all compete for the kicking job. Duliba comes into camp as the likely starting punter, replacing Zandrowicz. Candidates for kick return duty will come mostly from the Saxons' deep group of tailbacks. Raynor has returned kicks each of his three seasons with the team, and Pollizi showed his talent last year, returning one kick for a touchdown. Brady and Bouthillier will also drop back to return kicks. Coleman is a leading candidate to return punts.