

Experienced AU women's basketball team looks to climb Empire 8 standings

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ALFRED, NY Four returning starters, some solid bench players and several talented newcomers has the Alfred University women's basketball team optimistic about its chances of earning the school's first-ever Empire 8 Conference championship tournament berth. The Saxons and third-year head coach Jay Murphy did lose several key players (22 combined points per game from five departed seniors) from a team that went 10-15 in 2009-10 and finished 4-12 in the conference. But the squad returns its top four returning scorers, including senior guard Lyndsay Murphy (Almond, NY/Hornell), a two-time First Team conference all-star and the Saxons' leading scorer each of the last two seasons, and senior forward Autumn McLain (Oneida, NY/Oneida), who is back healthy after missing most of the last two seasons. Murphy, the coach's daughter, averaged a team-best 15 points, 4.3 boards, 2.6 assists and 1.6 steals per game last year, and will be counted on to provide leadership as a three-year captain. "We'll need Lyndsay to continue her offensive play. She knows how to score and pass," Murphy said. "She needs the whole team needs to commit to defense. That's going to be huge for us if we want to be in the top four in the Empire 8." After missing the 2008-09 season to a knee injury, the 5-10 McLain returned healthy last year. She gave AU a solid post presence, averaging nearly a double-double (10.2 points, 9.7 rebounds) before illness cut her season short after only 12 games. McLain gives AU a strong rebounder her 116 boards were second on the team, despite missing 13 contests and post defender. "She was just rounding into shape, coming off three straight double-doubles, when we lost her for the season," Murphy said of McLain. "It really hurt us in the post. She's a rebounding machine who goes after every loose ball, and she knows how to score in the paint and defend." Also returning as starters are senior point guard Courtney Lincoln (Waterloo, NY/Waterloo) and junior guard Christina Jordan (Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, NY/Cornwall). Lincoln joined the team in January last year after transferring from Keuka College and averaged 7.4 points, 4.3 rebounds and two assists in 18 games. Jordan averaged 7.8 points, shooting a team-best 33 percent from three-point range, to go with 3.1 rebounds. "Courtney knows the game and she's comfortable in our system," Murphy said of Lincoln. "She works very well with Lyndsay and is interchangeable between the point and two-guard spots." "Christina needs to continue to shoot the ball, but we need her to expand her game and work to get to the line more," Murphy said. Indeed, Lyndsay Murphy, Lincoln and Jordan getting to the foul line will help the Saxons' offense. Each shot 73 percent or higher last year, with Murphy leading the team with an 81 percent clip. Murphy got to the line 85 times and Lincoln 60, but Jordan was limited to only 22 attempts. "She needs to not be afraid to drive to the hoop," Murphy said of Jordan. AU returns a three backups who will contribute at the guard position: juniors Kacey Kwiecien (Perry, NY/Perry) and Molly Sullivan (Fonda, NY/Fonda-Fultonville) and sophomore Jaime Perry (Hannibal, NY/Hannibal). Kwiecien saw action in 23 games and averaged 1.3 points and 1.7 assists; Sullivan played in 11 games and scored 1.6 points per contest; and Perry, who also plays forward, was in 10 games and averaged just over a point per game. A host of new players join the roster and some will be counted on to step in and contribute right away. They include guard Cate Mensler (Ballston Spa, NY/Saratoga Catholic), forwards Grace Williamson (Olean, NY/Olean) and Sara Federico (Buffalo, NY/Holy Angels), and center Megan Kelly (Pine City, NY/Elmira Southside). The 5-8 Mensler, who will play primarily at shooting guard and small forward, is a solid perimeter player, Murphy said. "She posts up pretty well and is a very good defender on the ball." Williamson, at 5-9, "really knows the game. She rebounds and plays well in the post, offensively and defensively," Murphy commented. Federico (5-10) "will contribute right away. She has all the

tools to give us quality minutes. She has a good mid-range jumper and rebounds well."Kelly (6-0) gives the Saxons a solid post presence, Murphy said. "She's a good shot blocker. She needs to work some on her offensive game, but she's a good option for us down low."Newcomers providing depth to the lineup include freshman guards Brittany McFadden (Brooklyn, NY/Midwood) and Rachael Stedman (Springville, NY/Springville Griffith), freshman guard/forwards Kelly McNamara (Hurleyville, NY/Tri-Valley), and Nicole Ortega (Jamesville, NY/Jamesville-DeWitt), freshman center Erin Patterson (Portland, NY/Fredonia) and forward Lauren Sanford (Hornell, NY/Hornell), a senior transfer from Binghamton University."With the depth we have across the board, we should be able to stay fresh," Murphy said. "And it will allow the girls to challenge for spots and playing time. That will make us a better team."The Saxons possess plenty of scoring ability. Murphy said a commitment to defense and rebounding will determine if AU realizes its goal of making the conference championship tournament. The top four teams in the regular season conference standings make the tournament, with the winner earning the Empire 8's bid to the NCAA championships."Our first-shot defense was very good last year, but we gave up too many second-chance opportunities. Defending and rebounding will be huge for us this year," the coach commented.Murphy is excited about the enthusiasm and teamwork his squad has shown in the preseason. "This team gets along really well off the court, but once they're on the floor in practice they really compete. It's a long season. They just need to keep their energy all year long."