

Striker looks for continued improvement from AU women's swimmers and divers

10/28/08



ALFRED, NY The Alfred University women's swimming and diving team will look to continue building toward the success it had in head coach Brian Striker's second season (2003-04), when the Lady Saxons finished third at the New York State Women's Collegiate Athletic Association (NYSWCAA) championships. That squad had much more talent and depth than the current team, but with several solid swimmers and divers, this year's Lady Saxons should show improvement over last season 12th-place finish at the NYSWCAA meet. For Striker, the emphasis this year won't be as much on winning dual meets (the team went 2-8 last season) as it will be on getting the absolute most out of his swimmers and divers. "We can't focus on wins and losses," he said. "The focus, especially after the last few years, has to be on us becoming the best we can be, individually, and then we'll come together as a competitive unit." Leading the way for the Lady Saxons will be senior distance freestyler and captain Jessie Caccamo (Clifton Park, NY/Shenendehowa) and sophomore sprint freestyler Sarah Blair (Auburn, NY/Auburn). The top two swimmers in dual meets for AU a year ago (Caccamo had a team-best 12 wins in dual meets; Blair had seven), the pair, along with freshman Maggie Callesano (Gansevoort, NY/Saratoga) will be counted on to lead the team to improvement at the state meet. "Those are our top three swimmers," Striker said. "They will be put to the test, but each of them has the potential to be finalists at states." That would be significant, as no AU swimmer reached the finals (top eight) at last year's state meet. Caccamo was 24th in the 500-yard free and 13th in the 1,650-yard free at states, while Blair was 15th and 19th, respectively, in the 100-yard and 50-yard free. "Jessie's best year was when she was a freshman and I expect her to exceed that level this year. Sarah struggled with injuries last year and I'm looking forward to seeing great things from her this season," Striker said. "They both have the potential to break some school records and help this team move back in the right direction." Callesano brings plenty of talent and potential to the Lady Saxons. A "utility swimmer," Striker said she'll help the team in the breaststroke, individual medley and distance freestyle events. "She can do anything and everything and will be a major contributor to the team this season," he said. Key returnees from a season ago include senior diver Brynja Seagren (Bradford, PA/Bradford). As a junior, Seagren had nine dual-meet wins while also swimming on relays (primarily the fly in medley events). She was one of the team's top scorers at states, taking 15th in 1-meter and 3-meter diving. Senior Laura Smith (Pine Island, NY/Warwick Valley) is the other diver on the women's roster. She had six third-place finishes in dual meets a season ago. Other key returnees to the women's team include junior Meghan Jones (Beaver Falls, NY/Beaver River); seniors Anne Sheehy (Staatsburg, NY/FDR), Amy Buisman (Rochester, NY/Penfield) and Leigh Miller (Alfred Station, NY/Alfred-Almond); and sophomores Calista Merritt (Conesus, NY/Livonia), Kate Cohen (Bradford, PA/Bradford) and Cailin Asmo (Johnson City, NY/Johnson City). Jones, a team captain, and freshman Donna Hoops (Geneseo, NY/Geneseo) will be the team's top backstrokers. Jones had a pair of dual meet wins and one runner-up finish a year ago. Merritt complements Caccamo in the distance free events and hopes to improve on her freshman year, when she had one dual-meet win. Asmo (butterfly/middle distance freestyle) had one dual meet win and placed second four times. Buisman (breaststroke/IM) had four second-place finishes in dual meets a season ago, while Sheehy, a team captain, had a runner-up finish in dual meets as a junior in 2007-08. Cohen (two winning relays last year) and Miller provide depth in the sprint free events. In addition to Callesano, other newcomers include freshmen Julie Dalbey (Schenectady, NY/Schenectady) and Julie Slattery (Binghamton, NY/Seton Catholic), sophomore Ilana Zatkowsky (Rochester,

NY/Brighton), and senior Laura Turo (Fayetteville, NY/Fayetteville-Manlius). Because depth is not a strong suit, Striker will need every swimmer and diver to contribute, particularly at the NYSWCAA championships. "Our goal is to have each member of the team score in some fashion at the state meet," he said. If there is a single greatest strength on this year's Lady Saxons, it's a desire to improve: on last year's 2-8 dual meet record and the 12th-place finish at states. "The opportunity is there for this team to get better," Striker said. "We need to perform at a better and higher level and keep working hard throughout the season to just do the best they can at states."