

New coach Wellman set to lead AU men's basketball team

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ALFRED, NY All but two key players from a year ago return as head coach Dale Wellman begins his first year at the helm of the Alfred University men's basketball team. The former Williams College assistant also welcomes back standout forward Pat Smithgall (Perry, NY/Perry) as the Saxons look to improve on a 2-23 record from last season. While AU did lose a good portion of its scoring from 2007-08 forward Ellis Walsh (team-high 11.5 points per game) transferred and guard Garlen Patt (8.8 ppg) graduated there are several solid veterans returning. And Smithgall, one of the leading rebounders in the nation as a freshman, returns after missing last year with a knee injury. Wellman feels an added year's experience for his returnees, and Smithgall's return, coupled with the arrival of some solid newcomers will go a long way toward reversing the Saxons' fortunes from a season ago. "Everyone's a year older," said Wellman, who was hired this summer to replace longtime men's coach Jay Murphy, who left to take over the AU women's team. "A lot of the guys who saw significant playing time last year were freshmen. With the veteran leadership we have, they've been really energetic coming into this season. They don't want to experience that (2-23 record) again and they're working really hard to get going in the right direction." Wellman said he is pleased with how quickly the players are picking up his complex offensive schemes, and with the enthusiasm they are showing as they work to improve in all phases of the game. Smithgall's return will greatly help the Saxons' play in the post and should help the team reverse a significant disadvantage on the boards from a year ago, when opponents outrebounded AU by more than nine per contest. "Getting Pat back is huge. He's been an absolute beast in the paint. He's not going to be pushed around in the paint by anyone and he goes after every rebound" Wellman said of the 6-5 Smithgall, who averaged 9.5 rebounds (tops among all freshman in Division III) and 6.8 points in 2006-07. "He has a lot of finesse around the rim and has developed a good shooting touch. He'll be an integral part of our offense, which should help open up the outside." Sophomore Sean D'Auria (Highland Mills, NY/Cornwall) strengthens the Saxons' post game, particularly on defense. The 6-7 forward-center led the team in blocked shots last year with 31 while averaging 8.3 points and 3.9 rebounds. He creates matchup problems for opposing defenses because of his ability to step back and hit the long jumper (he made 14 three-pointers last year). "He's the one player on the team I'll ask to play more than one position," Wellman said of D'Auria. "He can shoot from outside and play down low. He's a good shot blocker and we hope that continues. It's important that he really hit the boards for us as well." Other low post players on the roster include 6-5 freshman center Bryan Bobo (Ontario, NY/Wayne) and 6-7 freshman center Matt Borsz (Columbia Station, OH/Midview). Both could see time behind Smithgall and D'Auria as they work to develop their games. The Saxons, while not deep, are experienced at the forward position, with 6-4 senior Carl Embury (Perry, NY/Perry) and 6-2 junior Jared Patt (Nelson, PA/Elkland) returning as starters from a season ago. They, along with Smithgall, will serve as captains this year. Embury may be the team's best shooter: he made 44 percent of his field goals last year (41.6 on three-pointers) and averaged 8.8 points and four rebounds. Wellman will look for Embury to hit the outside shot and drive to the hoop, where he's proven to be a solid finisher. "Carl has a tremendous shot and he can get to the rim and finish, which we'll need him to do," Wellman said. "He's worked hard on his defense. He can do a lot of things well and he has great leadership abilities." Patt can also stroke the ball from long range and can also get to the basket, as evidenced by his 59 free throw attempts last year. Wellman said Patt has been shooting the ball well in practice, but also points to his value as a defender. "He's probably our best defensive player," Wellman said of Patt, who averaged

7.6 points and 3.9 rebounds last season, while easily leading the team in steals with 41. "He'll be guarding the other teams' best perimeter players." Senior forward Ron Smith (Lyons, NY/Lyons), a cornerback on the AU football team, may be Wellman's most athletic player. He saw action in 18 games last year and averaged 5.3 points and 1.8 boards, while blocking 10 shots. The Saxons' roster is deep in the backcourt, as three guards return from a year ago to join four newcomers. Sophomore's Gary Kwiecien (Perry, NY/Perry), Mike Stopera (Scotia, NY/Scotia-Glenville) and Josh Parker (Tonawanda, NY/Sweet Home) each saw significant playing time a season ago and could share the roles of point guard and shooting guard this season. Kwiecien, a starter in 10 games as a freshman is one of the best ball handlers on the team (3.5 ppg, 32 assist in 2007-08) and is a tenacious defender (22 steals, 2.1 rebounds per game). Stopera has shown promise at the point in preseason and has improved in his ability to drive the ball to the rim. He played in 25 games last year, starting five, and averaged 2.8 points while dishing out 27 assists. Parker played in 19 contests last year, averaging two points. Wellman said he's made great strides on defense and has improved his shot. Junior Bobby Barry (Altamont, NY/Duanesburg), a transfer from Hudson Valley Community College, may be the best outside shooter among the team's guards. Providing depth at the guard position will be freshmen Griffin Taylor (New York, NY/Bronx School of Science) and Patrick Hollenbeck (Ontario, NY/Wayne), and junior Jossue Infante (New York, NY/HS of Economics and Finance), who returns to the team after taking last season off. Wellman has stressed the importance of defense, which will be an aggressive man-to-man. Rebounding, particularly on the defensive end, is key as the Saxons' hope to cut down on the second-chance points from a year ago. The offense is designed to get open looks for every player on the court, and it's important the team improve on its 37.5 percent shooting from last year. Cutting down on turnovers the Saxons averaged more than 16 a game in 07-08 is a must. Wellman is optimistic as he prepares the team for its season opener Nov. 15 at Wells College. The positive attitude team has shown, and its willingness to learn, bodes well as the Saxons look to improve on their 1-15 Empire 8 record from last season. "I was dealt a good hand as far as chemistry goes," he said. "These guys are sacrificing themselves for the good of the team. The camaraderie and the unselfishness they've shown they've been great in that respect. "Our goal is to take one game at a time and compete in every single game we play. We want to get better every day so that we're ready when that first game rolls around."