

## **AU women's swimming and diving team looks to make splash at state meet**◆

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ALFRED -- Heading into the 2003-04 season, AU head swimming and diving coach Brian Striker conceded his women's team would have to overcome youth and inexperience. It is obvious the squad has come a long way as it head into this weekend's New York State Women's Collegiate Athletic Association championship meet. "I think the team is in good shape," Striker commented. "It's been a challenge with 10 freshmen on the team, but they've really progressed well." Indeed, the women's team posted a solid 6-4 mark in dual meets this season, going 3-2 in Empire 8 action. The squad hopes its regular season success will continue into the state meet, which will be held Thursday through Saturday, Feb. 19-21, at Webster Shroeder High School. Striker is counting on his veterans to help the younger members as the team seeks to improve on its third-place finish at last year's state championships. "The state meet is very deep and competitive," he said. "Our upperclassmen know what to expect. They've done a good job getting (the younger members of the team) prepared." One veteran Striker expects big things from is senior Sara Thompson (Batavia/Batavia). Thompson is the school record holder in three individual events (100 and 200 breaststroke and 200 individual medley) and has swum on four school record-setting relay teams. He said Thompson has a great chance to qualify for the NCAA Division III championships, where she earned All-American honors as a sophomore in 2002. "Sara's gearing up for a run at the nationals," Striker said. "She'll definitely make some 'B' cuts (provisional qualifying times for the NCAAs) and has a good chance at getting some 'A' cuts (automatic qualifying times)." Thompson has dominated dual meets this year, claiming 23 top-three finishes, including 19 victories, and is far and away the team's leading points scorer. At last year's state meet, she won the 100 breaststroke and placed second and third, respectively, in the 200 breaststroke and 200 individual medley. Other veterans expected to make an impact at states include junior Lacey Clifford (Oil City, PA/Oil City), 10 wins and seven second-place finishes in dual meets; senior Becca Coppola (Takoma Park, MD/Montgomery Blair), 20 top-three finishes, including seven victories; sophomore Rachel Saroka (Groton/Groton), six dual meet wins, and junior Lauren McCormack (Norwich/Norwich), 14 top-three finishes, including three wins. At last year's state meet, Coppola was fifth in the 1650 freestyle, eighth in the 200 butterfly and ninth in the 500 freestyle. Saroka was eighth in the 200 backstroke 10th in the 200 individual medley, while Clifford was fifth in the 200 backstroke seventh in the 100 butterfly. Among Alfred's top newcomers this year are freshman diver Erin Collins (Owego/Owego) with nine dual meet victories; freshman Zara Racz (Morristown, NJ/Morristown), 16 top-three finishes in dual meets, including three victories, and freshman Genny Foote (New Windsor/Miss Porter's) with two dual meet wins.