

Experienced, deep AU men's soccer team has high expectations for 2005 campaign

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ALFRED, NY With depth and experience across the board, the Alfred University men's soccer team has high expectations for a successful season in 2005. Head coach Scott Miller is optimistic as he enters his second season at the Saxons' helm. "I'm excited about this team," said Miller, who guided AU to a 10-6-2 season in 2004. "We'll be better than most people think. "The Saxons' depth of talent is most evident up front, where three all-conference selections return at forward: juniors Bobby Linaberry (Manlius, NY/Fayetteville-Manlius) and Jarett Sanatar (Great Neck, NY/Great Neck North) and sophomore Adam Long (Bath, NY/Haverling). Linaberry (23 points on nine goals and a team-high five assists) and Sanatar (24 points on a team-leading 12 goals) were First Team all-conference while Long (six goals, three assists) was named to the Second Team. "We're going to have a lot of success going forward," Miller said of the scoring punch the Saxons will pack. "We have a lot of firepower up top. They're all eager to score goals." Adding depth to the Saxons' offensive attack will be senior Austin Lozier (Vestal, NY/Vestal), who rejoins the team after taking last season off, junior David Suddaby (Baldwinsville, NY/C.W. Baker) and freshman Adam Nudd (Bath, NY/Haverling). Despite the graduation of Brian Donahoe and Keith Phelan (both Empire 8 all-stars in 2004), the Saxons will be strong at the midfield. Starting in the middle will be junior Zach Hunkele (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy), who was fifth on the team in scoring in 2004 with nine points (3G, 3A). Hunkele is a skilled defender with a nose for the goal who will be counted on to set up AU's offensive attack. Sophomores Brian Adams (Horseheads, NY/Horseheads) and Rian Morgan (Byron, NY/Byron-Bergen) will likely be top choices at the outside midfield positions, with junior Brian Piccardo (Aspinwall, PA/Fox Chapel) and freshman Calvin Kordela (Elmira, NY/Elmira Free Academy), John McElveen (Poughkeepsie, NY/Poughkeepsie) and Neal McDowell (Alfred, NY/Alfred-Almond) providing options. The defense lost a great deal from last season, as Stephen Robin (three-year starter) and Randy Clukey (all-conference in 2004) graduated. Senior Adam Morgan (Byron, NY/Byron-Bergen) suffered a knee injury during the offseason and is uncertain of his time of return to the squad. Still, there are some skilled defenders who return, including senior captain Alex Karp (Clinton, CT/The Morgan School) and junior Zach Wise (Eliot, ME/Marshwood). Both were starters last year. "Alex is not only a solid defender, he's a team leader who we'll rely on to teach our younger players," Miller said. "Zach is a rock who will win every 50-50 ball that comes his way." Veterans Kian Merchant-Borna (Farmington, ME/Gould Academy) and Matt Jakielski (Mayton, PA/Lancaster Catholic) are juniors who will compete for playing time on defense. Newcomers looking to make an impact and who have shown great promise include sophomore John Hawes (Dartmouth, CT/Dartmouth) and freshmen Gavin Beem (Noblesville, IN/Noblesville) and Neal Sojda (Bozeman, MT/Bozeman). Two juniors captain Brian Middleton (Baldwinsville, NY/C.W. Baker) and Jim Roberts (Syracuse, NY/Westhill) will compete for playing time in goal. Both have played considerably over the first two years of their careers, with Middleton getting most of the starts. He was a Second Team Empire 8 all-star in 2004, when he posted a .714 save percentage and 1.23 goals against average. Roberts won two of three starts while turning in a 0.80 goals against average and .769 save percentage. "One of the most difficult decisions game-in and game-out will be determining who will be in goal. Each is capable of starting. Whoever has played the best in a given week will be in net," Miller said of his talented pair of goalies. "It's a good problem to have." Freshman Patrick Grimmer (Bath, NY/Haverling) rounds out the goalkeeping corps. Miller is confident his defense will play well. To take pressure off the back line, he said it's important that the offense and midfield produce quality, sustained attacks in the opponents' end of the field. "The most important thing is for us to understand that from the top back, we need to work hard defensively in order to be successful," he said. "The better we defend as a group, the better we'll be." The team's goal is to compete in and win the Empire 8 Conference championship tournament, the winner of which earns an automatic berth to the NCAA Division III championships. AU won the conference tournament in 2003 and competed in the NAACAs. Many of the players on this year's team played then and are eager for a return to the national tournament. "We're deeper and more well-rounded and I think we can be a better team than last year," Miller commented. "If we live up to our potential, we have a chance to reach our goals."