

It takes true dedication to play in EFL

You hear about dedication in sports now and then, but how can you relate to it when the athlete in question is a million-dollar-a-year man?

If you want to relate to pure dedication, look no farther than the Randolph Oilers and the Eastern Football League. That's dedication.

What we have here is a league of eight teams. Each team is required to pay \$500 in dues per year. New franchises shell out \$1,000. For their efforts, they get the right to sell tickets to minor league amateur football games. For those efforts, they're lucky to draw crowds of 300 per game.

Peter O'Kane ought to know. The general manager of the Oilers (and league treasurer) is preparing for the league's final game of the season tomorrow night (7:30) at Randolph High School field. He's about to finish another season of head-scratching, wondering how he's going to scrape enough money together to field another team. He will, of course,



but he's undergone a constant, yearly battle to keep the Oilers going.

"This is a good league, a strong league," O'Kane said. "I believe in it." He believes so strongly that he's spent weeks taking care of everything from furnishing uniforms to his players to purchasing medical supplies to posting circulars in storefront windows to handing out tickets to Pop Warner groups.

"When you get into this," he said, "you'd like to think that the gate will cover your expenses. I grew up watching the Park League in Hyde Park, so I figured it would be easy." But playing in Randolph isn't the same as playing in Boston. O'Kane

said Randolph is a good location for an EFL franchise, but it does have its problems.

He's invested more time, effort and money into the league than he can remember, but he's constantly forced to come out with other ways to meet expenses. One of his favorite methods is Las Vegas nights in Randolph. The fact is, the Vegas nights may be more successful than the football nights.

One saving grace is that EFL players aren't paid. They experimented with it in the 1960s but concluded that a runner making \$25 and scoring three touchdowns might get a little angry when a runner fumbling three times earns \$100 per game. "All we're trying to provide is the opportunity to play football," O'Kane said. There's also a matter of saving money from not having to pay workman's compensation and getting involved in matters of insurance and lawyers.

Which brings up some further dedication. The players are in it for the love of the game. The Oilers, who

returned to Randolph after four years in a poor Brockton location, draw many players from the Quincy-Weymouth-Milton-Route 128 area. That's been tough for them. Moving from Brockton cost them players who decided it was easier to play for the Taunton, Middleboro or Warren, R.I., franchises. Their record, 3-5, belies the fact that they've been starting over.

While there's a turnover, most come back, game after game. "Some people want to play football," said the GM. "You can't second-guess their love for the game. It's a sport they didn't want to give up after college and high school. The thing is, this isn't their living, so they put extra into it. For many, there's an obsession to go on to the NFL."

While that hasn't happened often, some EFL players have gone on. One former Oilers/Boston University star, Rick Horn, went on to play for the New York Giants. Others have made it in the Canadian League.

It's also a good opportunity for coaches to hone their talents. There

are some exceptional minds in this league. Randolph head coach Tom Pileski is the offensive coordinator at Brockton High School and also coached at Bridgewater State, Curry and Northeastern. Assistant Ed Casabian has been at Bridgewater State 10 years after a stint at Bridgewater-Raynham High School.

O'Kane played in the EFL ("years ago") and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. "I thought I knew what it involved," he said, "but I didn't. At the beginning I just hoped to play, but got hurt. Eventually, I began to take on different responsibilities. It's been a real challenge."

One of the biggest challenges has been drawing fans. For the first three home games of the season, the Oilers were forced to play on hot Sunday afternoons. O'Kane finally secured an excellent lighting system, which was donated to the town for high school games, and is currently trying to convince people to come and see what he considers an excellent show

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tomorrow night. He knows winning is the best solution to drawing fans, and he hopes he can send them away with good memories for next season.

Many EFL teams draw quite nicely. Fans in Middleboro, for instance, often accompany their team on a trip to Albany. Albany is the most distant of the team's eight franchises.

But O'Kane would just as soon stay in Randolph, figuring that it's a fine, central location and easily accessible with adequate parking. "We want to keep at this," he said. And you can bet he will.