

RANDOLPH OILERS WIN FIRST EFL CHAMPIONSHIP

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RANDOLPH –

Peter O'Kane's playing career as a member of the Randolph Oilers was short-lived.

"I suffered a knee injury at the first-ever practice and that was it," O'Kane.

Although he has never played a down for the Randolph Oilers, O'Kane has been a member of the Eastern Football League's 1990 champions since the league's inception.

O'Kane, a former Randolph High running back in the 1950s and a member of the Town Team in the '60s, now owns O'Kane News Distributors, a newspaper distribution company in Randolph.

"We began in 1974," O'Kane recalls. "I was 35 years old when I was asked to start the team. Yeah, I wanted to play, but I think I was asked so I could help organize the team more than anything else."

Today O'Kane, 51, by his own admission, is the "chief cook, bottle-washer, general manager and go-fer" for the Oilers, who have soared to new heights in 1990. Last Sunday, they beat the Marlborough Shamrocks in sudden-death overtime, 27-21, to win their first league championship.

"I've been associated with sports teams all my life," O'Kane said. "And I thought I had seen everything. But this team --the 1990 Oilers -- has taught me how much chemistry means to a team. These Oilers are real close -- good friends. They are a wonderful group."

The town of Randolph has taken to the Oilers as well. The local VFW is having a buffet for the team today and the team has been in the prayers of members of the local temple as well as at the Catholic church.

"The players have tried to give back to the community," O'Kane said. "They have raised money for local charities, scholarships and for youngsters who have been injured."

When one thinks of semiprofessional football, the stereotype is of a loosely knit league with a haphazard schedule and a team roster that changes every week.

But that isn't exactly true when it comes to the Eastern Football League and the Randolph Oilers.

"We have 60 players and they all suit up for every game," O'Kane said.

Although the championship season ended last Sunday, it wasn't a short season. It began last January.

"At that time, the players met once a week and worked out, threw the ball and played a little basketball," said O'Kane. The exercises, stretching drills and a game of hoop were beneficial but the real plus was the camaraderie, the friendships that were made among the players.

From May to last week, the players practiced three times a week, including Saturday mornings. If a player missed practice, the rule was that he could not start that week's game.

Everyone played for the Oilers. Breaking down their scoring by quarters, there was a huge dropoff in the fourth quarter.

"That's because we were ahead and cleared the bench," O'Keefe said.

O'Keefe credits this year's coaching staff with the team's success.

After having nine coaches in the first 10 years of the franchise, the Oilers have had two coaches in the last six years, Tom Pileski, who now serves as athletic director at Brockton High School, and the current coach, Bob Turner.

Turner is assisted by a retired Oiler, Paul Killinger, who was an all-scholastic star in the 1960s.

The unbeaten and untied Oilers were ranked third in one national poll and fourth in another among the top semipro teams in North America.

They are certain for postseason action, although details remain to be worked out. "There is talk about playing a team from Russia at Gill Stadium in Manchester, N.H.," O'Kane said. And there has been talk about the national title as well.

Last year, Marlborough advanced to the semifinals before bowing out to the Ottawa Bootleggers. The national title was won by Racine, Wis.

If the Oilers make it to the national championship, it will be by their passing attack and staunch defense.

The passer is the former signal-caller for Bridgewater State, Bobby Witt, who has a league-record 17 touchdown passes in nine games. He missed two games in the middle of the season -- he was married and went on a honeymoon -- and was replaced by John Pina, who directed the offense to a pair of victories.

The top receiver is Stoughton's Mark Harding, who is the top receiver in the Eastern Football League and its second-leading scorer. The other wide receiver is Ricky Witt, the younger brother of the quarterback.

The younger Witt did not play football at Rockland High School. He was an all-scholastic soccer player instead. He picked up football afterward. "He'd be a great athlete in any sport," O'Kane said. "He's just that talented."

In the backfield, the Oilers have Mike Waite, who was the NCAA Division III leading scorer at Curry in '87 and the second leading rusher in the Eastern Football League this year. He is joined by Jay McGee, a former Brockton High flash who played his collegiate ball at the University of Hawaii.

Opening the holes and holding off the pass rushing on the offensive line for Randolph are the Penn brothers, Eddie, who is the team captain, and Jerome, who were members of the Shelburne Colts, who play in the Hyde Park and Roxbury area, before joining the Oilers. Guards Norm Eliason and John Boughner and center Curt Curcuru are under consideration for all-Eastern Football League honors.