

An EFL brother act

■ Coach Ed Penn and offensive tackle Jerome Penn of the Randolph Oilers will face brother Sam Jr., the coach of the Hyannis Hurricanes, Saturday.

By Glen Farley
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

THE Eastern Football League will be in a Penn state of mind this weekend.

"I want this to be a Randolph Oilers-Hyannis Hurricanes game, but the whole league's excited," Ed Penn, the Oilers' third-year head coach, said. "The other coaches who are playing that night are disappointed. Everyone in the league wants to see the first annual Penn Bowl."

Call it the Penn ultimate game, for when the Hurricanes host the Oilers at the Marston Mills Middle School at 4 o'clock Saturday afternoon, it will pit the oldest of Sam Sr. and Louise Penn's five sons (Hyannis general manager and head coach Sam Jr.) against their second- and third-oldest boys (Randolph head coach Ed and offensive tackle Jerome).

Little did it matter that the youngest of the Penns' sons — Chris, who went on to play basketball for a state championship team at Madison Park, and Steve — never developed the fondness for football Sam Jr., Ed and Jerome had.

As long as Sam Jr., Ed and Jerome were around, there was pigskin passion in the Penn household on Robin Hood Street, Roxbury.

"Growing up in Roxbury, the street right in front of our house was where all the two-hand touch (football) games in the neighborhood were played," Sam Jr. said. "It got so our neighbors would see us heading out there, come out and move their cars off the street to give us room, then sit outside and watch us play."

In many ways, tomorrow's game at the Marston Mills Middle School will be like those old two-hand touch games on Robin Hood Street: A lot of familiar faces will gather 'round to watch the three oldest Penn boys involved in the game they love.

"My mother is coming down, and we'll have sisters, brothers, nephews, nieces and in-laws there," Sam Jr., who is 47, said. "And our late father will be looking down from the heavens above," Ed, who is four years younger than Sam Jr., added.

Then again, the way Sam Jr. sees it, this game is a godsend. "It really is like a dream come true for me," he said. "I helped Ed in Randolph and it was a pleasure to be on the same team as him and Jerome, but after a while it hit me to start a team down here on the Cape."

"The last game last year I said to Ed, 'I'm going to try to start a team on Cape Cod.' He said, 'Good luck.' It is a lot of work, but I hope to make this game an EFL tradition for years to come."

To be sure, when the 2-4 Hurricanes host the 0-5 Oilers tomorrow afternoon, there will be a lot more at stake than bragging rights within the Penn family.

"This," Sam Jr. said, "is a much-needed win for both of us. Ed's got to get that first win and I've got to see if I can get this expansion team of mine into the playoffs. I hope Ed gets it together. I really do. I just hope it happens after Aug. 19."

"We're struggling," said Ed. "We've put ourselves in a position where we're going to have to win each game from here on in to get into the playoffs. Unfortunately, the first one has to come against the Hyannis Hurricanes."

While the Hurricanes have two more wins than the Oilers, the way Ed has it figured, when they line up tomorrow, the numbers will be stacked in his favor.

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ED PENN

Brother act in the EFL

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Maybe, but Sam Jr. can't say he wasn't forewarned.

"Ed called me after he and Jerome went to the Marlboro-Boston game (last Saturday night)," Sam Jr. said. "He said, 'You've got a mad bunch of Randolph Oilers coming down there next week.' I said, 'Bring 'em on.'"

Why not? Even when they were growing up in Roxbury, a family of 10 (five boys, three girls), the Penns took a bring-it-on approach to football.

"We made up our own league," Sam Jr. said, "and we had some tough collisions, let me tell you. When my mother left the house, we would tear up that reception hall. We had these plastic helmets that said right on them, 'Do not use for contact,' but we'd use elastic straps to keep them on and we would absolutely clobber each other."

"We'd dive like Sam 'Bam' Cunningham into the end zone, which just so happened to be a door," Sam Jr. laughed. "Jerome was like four or five years old at the time and he'd do it, and Ed and I would look at each other and say, 'Did you see that? That kid's amazing.'"

It's amazing Jerome survived, but, then again, perhaps it explains why, at the age of 38, Jerome is alive and well and manning a starting position in the Oilers' offensive line.

"Jerome's very, very strong," Oilers co-owner and general manager Peter O'Kane said, "and, the thing is, he never stops moving."

As a youth, he didn't have much choice.

"Ed and I kind of rushed him," Sam Jr. admitted. "It was like, hurry up and grow up so we can bounce you around."

Jerome grew up, alright, developing into a home run-hitting teen the New York Mets had some interest in. Today, though, Jerome does all his hitting as a 330-pounder in the Oilers' line.

But then, each of these Penns has made a mark in semipro football.

Sam Jr. played nine years in the Boston Park League, dating back to 1978 with the Shelburne Cobras in Roxbury and ending in 1986 when he was a 33-year-old guard on the Taunton Raiders, where his teammates included a tackle named Ed Penn and a tight end named Jerome ("He was much slender back then").

"We played the Metro Mallers in a playoff game," Sam Jr. said, "and my wife (Maryann) and I drove our beat-up, old Chrysler to Albany. When we lost that game, I knew my playing days were over. Walking out, I whirled my white Kangaroo shoes into the woods behind that stadium in Albany."

This represents season No. 21 in semipro football for Ed, whose playing career earned him induction into the United States Football Association and who just last year shared EFL Coach of the Year honors with the Charlestown Townies' Jack Coneeny after guiding the Oilers into the playoffs.

"This is the level of football I've come to know," said Ed. "I didn't play college or pro ball, but amateur football has provided me with a clean, hard-nosed brand of football that's kept me off the streets. You do something stupid on the streets and you get arrested. You do something stupid here and they throw a little flag. They don't haul you off to jail."

"This is a workingman's league I hope I'm involved in the rest of my life. I don't have a wife. The way I look at it, I'm married to the EFL and the Randolph Oilers. There are no multimillionaires here. The people here play football for the L-O-V-E of the game in capital letters."

Why else would someone like Jerome, a guy who will hit the big four-oh in the not-too-distant future, work moving furniture by weekday and pull on a helmet and pads and play by weekend night?

Just last year, Jerome was honored with the EFL's annual sportsmanship award, joining a list of past recipients that includes his brother and head coach, Ed.

"Coaching him has been a pleasurable experience," said Ed. "It's really been a blessing. It's been fun and, at the same time, it's brought us even closer."

Exactly one decade ago, Ed and Jerome were members of an Oilers team that won the last league title prior to the nine-year dynasty Marlboro currently holds.

"The greatest thing to come out of that," said Sam Jr., "was Ed and Jerome purchased our dad a ring. Growing up, he didn't have the opportunity to see us play a lot, but he was a hard-working man who provided for his family."

Sam Sr. will surely be watching from his sky box tomorrow to see who will win bragging rights in his family.

"I'm close to my brothers," Sam Jr. said, "but we're competitive."