

## LOCAL SQUAD PROVIDES A STAGE FOR NFL DREAMS EX-BC PLAYER NOW STARS FOR SEMIPRO OILERS

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RANDOLPH - At the age of 28, Anthony Comer still has the physical tools that made him a legendary running back at Brockton High School.

He has the speed that enabled him to rush for 1,993 yards and 17 touchdowns at Nassau Community College in New York in 1992. And he has the versatility that caused ESPN's Mel Kiper to include him among his long-shot Heisman Trophy candidates in the fall of 1994, while Comer was with Boston College.

So why was Comer practicing on a dimly lighted field on an unseasonably chilly July night recently with the semipro Randolph Oilers of the Eastern Football League, rather than preparing for a pro training camp?

Variations of that question are many. Answers are few.

"He was a bona-fide Division 1 college football standout," said an Oilers kicker, Dave Canavan of Hingham. "We don't get too many of them in this league. He should be getting a chance from someone out there somewhere."

The problem Comer hasn't been able to get around is his exit from Boston College in 1994. After showing potential by rushing for 381 yards and two touchdowns in limited playing time in his junior year, he was slated for the starting tailback role his senior season. But he left the team midway through the season for academic reasons, and apart from playing two seasons in the Arena Football League, and apart from a two-week tryout with the New England Patriots two years ago, Comer hasn't had the opportunity to showcase his wares on a professional level.

"There's so much politics at that level," Comer said. "It's almost like they see you are doing good at the semipro level and they don't think you can do it at the pro level, so it's hard to break through and get that chance."

If the pro scouts were to give Comer a more serious look, they could see a player who has diversified his skills since his college days. Back then, Comer was known simply as a running back. In the EFL, he does it all - starting quarterback, running back, punter, and he even helps out on defense when asked. Last season,

he was named EFL offensive co-MVP after racking up a league-high 10 touchdowns, seven rushing, and after leading the league in punting with an average of 39.7 yards per kick.

The Oilers struggled to a 3-7 record last season, deceptive in that four of their losses were by eight points or fewer and they actually outscored their opponents on the season. They are off to a 2- 1 start this year after a 26-6 victory last Sunday at Charlestown. In that contest, Comer ran for 106 yards and two touchdowns.

Comer started slowly this year because of a minor Achilles' heel injury; he is now declared to be back to full health. He is expected to see more time at quarterback this season than at running back.

"That's the thing about Anthony - he can do it all out there," said the Oilers coach, Ed Penn. "This year we need him at quarterback. No matter what we ask him to do, he goes out there and does it. Athletically, no doubt about it, he is one of the two or three best in the league."

Comer obviously responds to his coach's confidence in him, as he boldly predicts that the Oilers, who last won the EFL title in 1990, have what it takes to knock off 10-time defending league champion Marlborough, which has also won four consecutive national semipro championships.

"You can put that in the paper: We are going to beat Marlborough," whom they play on Aug. 31, he said. "We have the right mix of talent and attitude, and we aren't afraid of them."

At this stage, Comer has gotten philosophical about the progression of his football career.

"I'm at the point where I'm not going out of my way trying to make calls to teams anymore," he said. "If they call me, that's great, I'll follow up, but I have a good full-time job and a family now. If it doesn't happen, we still have a good team here."