

# In their 30<sup>th</sup> season, Randolph Oilers bounce back from lowpoint

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Last summer the Randolph Oilers had a lot in common with Davy Crockett and the defenders of the Alamo - no matter how inspired their efforts, they were always outmanned and outgunned.

Last summer the perennial Eastern Football League power Oilers won their opening game and then stumbled to nine straight losses. There was an epidemic of injuries, depleting a roster already small in size and numbers. Early in the season quarterback Anthony Comer defected to the Middleboro Cobras and no permanent replacement was found. One memorable game saw three consecutive Oilers QBs knocked out of action and the way the undermanned offensive line was blocking there weren't exactly a lot of volunteers to take the next snap. Morale hit a low point, and practices were sparsely attended. To cap off the brutal year, the Oilers' owner, Peter O'Kane, had to undergo quintuple heart bypass surgery late in the season. This season is not only the 30th anniversary of the Randolph Oilers, it's turning out to be a season in which that proud name ranks once more among the EFL's elite. The Oilers opened the season earlier this month with a 34-14 thrashing of the Middlesex Mayhem and followed that with a 31-6 pasting of the Roxbury Panthers. Don't look now, but the Oilers have already doubled last season's victory total.

Randolph hosts Middlesex in a rematch at 8 p.m. tomorrow at Randolph High.

The results aren't only obvious on the scoreboard, for this year's edition of the team has vastly improved size, depth and talent at every position. "Last year we had a lot of injuries, no depth and a very tough season," said O'Kane after Tuesday's practice. "I was beginning to wonder if anyone really wanted to play for this team, but then at our first session, we had over 150 people sign up. A lot of people have stepped up, worked a lot harder, and changed things completely around."

The most obvious change is on the staff where veteran head coach Ed Penn has been given some big-time help. Fran Cass, a former head coach and part-owner of the Middleboro franchise, has come aboard as offensive coordinator. Ed's brother, Sam Penn, has been added as running backs coach. Brothers Ron and Don Meyers have bolstered the staff by coaching linebackers and defensive backs, respectively. John Gates, who was head coach of the New England Storm female football squad, has returned as defensive coordinator.

"I like having two other head coaches here," Ed Penn said of Cass and Gates. "It makes my job much easier. I believe in letting my coaches coach, and my players play. We've been getting 40 to 50 guys at every practice, where last year we were lucky if we got 12. Morale is up because guys know now they won't have to go both ways. The spirit and the camaraderie is back and it's like one big family again. Here we just had practice and

most of us are now over at the Randolph VFW having some food and watching the ballgame, hanging out together."

Most obviously, the quarterback problem has been solved with three solid signal callers. Veteran Tony Gaucher brings the savvy of his many EFL campaigns and two newcomers have added a big-league passing attack to the mix. Young scrambler Ryan Meyers of Holbrook gave up his senior year of eligibility at Bridgewater State to play for the Oilers while Brockton High alumnus Eric Boatwright is a pocket passer with a cannon for an arm. "Ryan used to be one of our waterboys," Penn said. "He has proven to be a great team leader in his short time at the helm. A lot of his best passes are thrown off the rollout and his ability to move around gives us a new dimension. Eric Boatwright, at 6-5, and 225 pounds, has such a strong arm I think he could be a heckuva baseball pitcher. Eric is more of a drop-back passer. This season we are very strong at quarterback."

The other side of the offensive output has been the running game, good enough to have three of the top four EFL rushers wearing Oiler jerseys.

"Mike Green, a veteran of ours, is the league's top rusher so far," O'Kane said. "Mike led our division of the EFL in rushing last year and he's a talented all-around back. Calvin Bryant is our big back, at 250 pounds, and he's a good receiver, too, who set several records playing at Merrimac. Our third back is capable of playing tailback or fullback, Albert Louis-Jean, and he has size - at 225- as well as versatility. Albert had a great career at Jeremiah Burke High School in Boston."

The EFL, with 11 teams in two conferences last season, has contracted to nine this year and no longer divides its teams into divisions.

The revitalized Randolph receiving corps also includes some game- breakers, with Chris Williams, who led the division in touchdown catches last year, leading the way. Gabe Boatwright, brother of the QB, was hurt early last year and didn't get to show much, but he's ready to make waves this season. Ex-Middleboro High star MacKenzie Harrison is another fleet pass-catching machine while tight end Brian Berg of Braintree adds muscle up front.

With a successful passing game and a rugged running game, Randolph has solved its offensive line problems.

"This year we have very good size, and a lot of linemen," O'Kane said. "In this league you can be missing two or three linemen every week, due to work and other commitments. This year we have enough depth so that those situations won't bother us."

"We have many more large-size linemen," Penn agreed. "Last year we had my brother Jerome and he's back, along with Jimmy Pane of Stoughton, and Damon Brown from Boston English. Those are all 300- pound guys who can really play football."

"The lack of offensive and defensive linemen we had last year is probably our biggest area of improvement," Penn added. "A lot of games in the EFL are won at the line of scrimmage. Last year we had guys going both ways. Now, we have 10 offensive linemen and about 12 defensive linemen, so we have depth and versatility."

When you add in those guys who have gone both ways and can fill in if needed, we can potentially call on 15 different linemen on either side of the ball."

"The whole team is like a family again, and I haven't seen that here since 1990," Gates said. "Celebrating the 30th year of doing something we all love, as well as being able to repay Peter for all he's done for us, makes this very rewarding," Penn added.