

Eastern Football League: Oilers have a little extra incentive; Randolph hosts R.I. in tonight's opener

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With a solid core of veterans returning and some exciting new offensive talent, the Randolph Oilers enter tonight's Eastern Football League opening game with high hopes.

With general manager Peter O'Kane possibly retiring from the EFL after this season, every Oiler wants to send him off with a winning season and good playoff run.

Randolph hosts the Rhode Island Prowlers at 8 p.m. at Randolph High School.

"I almost get goose bumps thinking about some of these guys," Oilers coach Ed Penn said. "It's exciting. We've had practices since May, and we've done very well in two scrimmages against our league's top team, the Middleboro Cobras, and the Boston Bandits from the New England Football League. It's a nine-game season this year, and we are pretty sure we can win at least five games to get into the playoffs, then we'll see where the chips will fall. If this is Peter's last year, we want to get things together for him, and get into those playoffs."

Last summer the Oilers finished 3-5, missing the EFL postseason by a hair. Needing to win their final game at Charlestown, Randolph lost on the game's last play.

"We've know this team is competitive, but we had to mature," O'Kane said. "It is always a hard league, and certain teams are always strong, but we are very encouraged by the new players we have, and we threw the ball very well in both scrimmages. Our offensive line is giving our quarterbacks more time to throw, and we have a lot better depth all over the team."

That depth starts at quarterback, where Holbrook High's Ryan Myers returns to his third year at the helm in Randolph. Myers, who also played at Bridgewater State, is 5-10 and 190 pounds, and a threat either throwing or running. Backing him up is Stoughton's Jimmy Yaitanes, coming off a good season for the South Shore Outlaws in the NEFL.

"I see them as No.1 and 1-A," Penn said. "Ryan is the starter, but Jimmy Y is right there with him, and if anything happens, we can be confident in his ability too. Both guys get the same reps in practice, and even if he's not playing quarterback, Jimmy Y will be helping us somewhere else because he's a great athlete."

Randolph's backfield is dominated by Charles Thomas, the West Virginia State product who stands 6 feet and weighs 260, and can move a pile with authority. Blue Hills Regional High grad Frank Gaudette is back as the blocking back to open holes for Thomas. The receiving corps is where the Oilers made their biggest additions. Penn's nephew, Barnstable native Andre Barboza comes from the Outlaws, where he scored 12 touchdowns as they cruised to an unbeaten regular season. Barboza (6-3, 195) added three more TDs in the postseason. Norwood's Jason McIntyre (6-3, 190) will also see duty at tight end. Dorchester's Dana Jones (5-11, 180) is back as the Oilers' possession receiver, and Coyle-Cassidy great Vinny Ventosi (5-8, 180) will see action receiving, kick returning, and occasionally at cornerback.

The offensive line is big and now has a year more experience under its belt, which should pay dividends. 2005 addition and former UNH Wildcat T.D. Thompson adds toughness, size (6-4, 255), and versatility with his ability to play tight end, offensive tackle, and defensive end.

North Quincy's Johnny Moss (5-9, 365) anchors the offensive line, with Jamie Hamilton (6-5, 285) from Eastern Illinois, and Tom Deegan (6-1, 275) from Norwich manning the tackle spots. Ten-year EFL vet Brian Berg will see action at offensive and defensive line.

"In my 33 years in the league, the biggest change I've seen is the size of the players," O'Kane said. "The other thing is how long they play now. With better conditioning, they can work out and play into their 40s."

On the defensive side, safety Mark Royster of Brockton leads a solid crew. Cornerbacks will likely include Jason Garcia of Dean Junior College, Ventosi, and Ryan Pipken, a 5-11, 195-pound rookie.

At linebacker, the Oilers boast all-league stalwarts John O'Brien from Framingham State, and John Martelle, along with Curry's Mike McGonagle. The Oilers defensive line includes veteran Sterling Bishop, and all-league defensive end Kevin Callahan (6-4, 255) from Fitchburg State. The Oilers expect their kicking game to be a strength, with Brian Irwin, from BC High and Boston University, returning to both punt and place kick. "Brian booms his kickoffs into the end zone, and is an excellent place kicker and punter," O'Kane said. "We're looking for an exceptional year from him."

Entering his ninth season as Oilers coach, Penn is also looking forward to his third year as offensive coordinator. "We have good arms and some great new receivers, so I think you'll see us go to a more wide-open air attack," Penn said. "Our offensive line is so good they allow us to spread out in split formations to challenge the defenses, and we have the big back to hand the ball off to, to keep the defenses honest."

"Defensively, we will stick with the basic 4-3," Penn added, "but you might see more attacking, more blitzing, more getting after the ball and trying to make things happen."

This week's foes went winless last year, but Penn said they can't be taken lightly. "Rhode Island lacked depth, and often played with 15-16 guys last year," he said, "but they were a scrappy bunch; 15 or 16 of the toughest guys you'd see. We're just focusing on getting that first win."