

Eastern Football League adds two teams for 2008 season

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QB Ryan Myers and the Randolph Oilers are headed in the right direction

Randolph-

Unlike the sagging U.S. economy, the Eastern Football League is hoping its stock continues to rise.

Whittled down to just four teams last year because of financial difficulties and teams such as the Middleboro Cobras defecting to other leagues, the EFL has expanded this year.

The holdovers — the Brockton Buccaneers, Randolph Oilers, Clinton Irish Blizzard and Charlestown Townies — will be joined by two newcomers — the Northern Berkshire Kings and the University of Maine Tackle Football Club — when the league launches its 47th season this weekend.

The Maine entry has no affiliation to the University of Maine at Orono.

Rather than lamenting the past, league executives are choosing to focus on what lies ahead for the EFL.

“We made a solid effort to get the league back up to 10 teams, but things just didn’t work, at least for this year,” said EFL president Bob Kalinyak. “Our goal for the future is to have two divisions, one for established teams and the other for teams looking to build their franchises. We’ll continue to work toward this goal.

“But for now, we’re happy with the six teams we have. Brockton, Randolph, Clinton and Charlestown are solid franchises with a good following of fans. We expect the same from our newest teams.”

The team with a “bull’s eye” on its back is without question the Buccaneers. The defending champions begin their title defense Saturday when they host Clinton at Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School. Game time is slated for 7 p.m.

“We know that teams will be out for us,” said team president and 17-year player Derek Wright. “Even though several players retired, we’ve added youth, so we feel we will be up to the task of defending our title.”

History is certainly on the side of the Buccaneers, who’ve been in the title game in each of the four seasons the team has been in existence.

Heading the list of returnees is seasoned quarterback Anthony Comer. His favorite targets will be wideouts Richard “Bo” Garcia, last year’s league offensive MVP, Wayman Payne and Greg Anderson, along with tight end Alan Bercy.

Cornerback Rigobert Noel, who was named the league’s Defensive Rookie of the Year, heads the list of defensive returnees. Joining Noel will be defensive end Rasheed Chinn, defensive tackle Djassi Pires, nose tackle Miguel Oliva, cornerback Jason Pires and safety William “Bunny” Jefferson.

“We’ve got a tough opener,” said Wright. “Clinton and Charlestown should be there at the end.”

As for the Oilers, the league’s oldest existing franchise (35th season), there is nowhere to go but up.

Winless a year ago and just 3-10 two years ago, Coach Ed Penn has a positive outlook as his team prepares for its opener Friday night when Charlestown visits Randolph Memorial Field for an 8 p.m. contest.

“Last year, we had a difficult time getting a good foundation together,” said Penn, who was elected to American Football Association’s Hall of Fame last December. “We lost several core players who opted to play for Weymouth, but we are returning several key veterans and have some good, young players on our roster.”

In Penn’s words, “it all starts with the quarterback” and the Oilers have a good one in Ryan Myers.

The Holbrook native, who was given the league’s Sportsmanship Award last season, has been impressive in the preseason, tossing 10 touchdown passes in four contests.

“Ryan’s got a great arm, is very athletic and is extremely elusive,” said Penn.

Myers’ favorite targets will be Andre Barboza and Brook Payne.

The bulk of the ball carrying will be split between Charles Thomas and J.T. Nickley, the league’s Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2007.

The offensive line will be anchored by T.D. Thompson.

Linebackers Mike McGonagle and John Marquardt, cornerbacks Mark Royster and Dan Carroll, and linemen Jesse Barboza and Anthony Goodwin head the list of returning defensive starters.

“We’re excited about the upcoming season,” said Kalinyak. “We’re already planning for our 50th season.”