

# Granite, Oilers rolling in EFL

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The Patriot Ledger

With the summer heat approaching sweltering highs, and the playoffs seemingly just around the corner, the Randolph Oilers and the Quincy Granite of the Eastern Football League are hoping their midseason form holds strong for the playoff rush.

The Granite are 5-0 and have been mauling opponent after opponent with their stifling defense and consistent pass rush.

"We're the first team to qualify for the playoffs so far," defensive coordinator Tony Green said of the Granite. "We've been winning, but they've been really close games, and the defense has really come up big so far."

Al Casey, an ironworker by day and a defensive lineman by night, has been one of the keys to the Granite defense.

"He's such a physical specimen, and he always gets the job done," Green said. "He's 40 years old and about 290 pounds. He collapses the pocket, and he always drives people back."

Defensive end Anvelson Merisca, 23, who played his college ball at UMass-Lowell, is another player who has been instrumental in keeping opposing quarterbacks on their toes.

"He's a hell of a pass rusher, and he's so fast for a defensive end," Green said. "He's 6-6, and he's about 295 pounds, and he is so quick."

Patrolling the secondary is UMass-Dartmouth product John Skibekis. The free safety is continuing to dominate after last season when he led the league with 17 interceptions.

"He's very intelligent, and he's a ball hawk," Green said. "He already has five picks in five games." Skibekis is a fed-

Please see **EFL** — Page 47

# Granite, Oilers rolling

■ **EFL**

Continued from Page 45

eral agent when he's not picking off passes. "We've got both cops and robbers on this team," Green said with a laugh.

Cornerback Troy Parks has also been putting together a fine season in the secondary with three interceptions. He ran back an interception for a touch-down and scored on a fake punt.

Mike Thomas and Liam Higgins have been splitting time at quarterback and have both been productive.

Thomas, who was a standout at the University of North Carolina, also serves as the Granite punter.

"He (Thomas) is great, and he's so physical," Green said. "He's done great, and the offensive line is starting to click and give the quarterback some protection."

Higgins is a Hofstra graduate, who spent his college days tossing passes to New York Jets receiver Wayne Chrebet.

"Higgins has played in three games so far, and he's done a really good job," Green said. "Whenever one of (the quarterbacks) is hurting, the other is able to step in and produce."

Jackson Vitiac, a Boston English product who has been handling the rushing duties for the Granite, has been finding the end zone frequently so far this season.

"He has around five or six touchdowns, and he's been hitting the holes hard," Green said. "He's got some great movement, and he's got a jitter-bug shake to him."

Vitiac's brother, Maxwell, has also been spicing up the Quincy ground game. He has 100 yards on two carries.

Green thinks the Granite are starting to jell offensively and the support from the Quincy fans has been a big contributor to the team's success.

"We're excited, and the fans have been really great. They're into every game, and it helps," Green said. "We need to fine-tune some things, and we need a little work, but we're excited to be undefeated."

The Oilers are 3-1 The team has

picked up some new players recently after one of the league's teams, the Boston Cowboys, folded.

"We've picked up about three big offensive lineman, and we've also added 10-year veteran Derek Wright," Oilers head coach Ed Penn said. "We ran him (Wright) last week, and he carried six times for 50 yards."

Penn is happy with the way his team has played and is hoping that the offense starts to open up and start devouring opposing defenses.

"We're playing right where I thought we'd be," Penn said. "For us to compete with the good teams, we have to step up our red zone offense and start putting teams away. We're controlling games, we just need to finish."

The offense, led by last year's EFL MVP, quarterback Anthony Comer, has some standouts.

"Comer is settling in nicely, and we're really deep in running backs," Penn said. "We have a lot of talent, and it's just a matter of having the right guys in at the right time."

Wide receiver Danny Grew has been pulling in a good amount of passes and has been a force for the Oilers.

"He's been a super receiver so far, and he's a big-time player," Penn said. "A lot of teams tend to underestimate him, and when he's healthy he moves around very nicely."

Penn's defense has been strong.

"Defensively, Rob Davenport and Larry Taggart have been playing great at linebacker," Penn said. "Sam Pearson (strong safety) has been stepping it up for us. Our secondary is so much better because of his leadership and play."

Though Penn is happy the team is off to a strong start, he's aware there's a long road to the playoffs, and an even longer road if they get there.

"We have to tighten up in a few spots," Penn said. "We're starting to face some good teams coming up, and it's time to peak. We are more than a playoff contender. We want to win the whole thing."

Quincy is to play at Randolph at 7 p.m. Aug. 18.

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