

Can the Brockton Oilers make a go of it?

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The opening night reviews were good as semi-pro football returned to Brockton after a long absence.

But, there's a danger signal worth mentioning.

When Jack Hopwood's Brockton Pros were playing at either Eldon B. Keith Field or the Brockton Fairgrounds, the team actually became so strong the league died for lack of competition.

Last Friday night when the Brockton Oilers — formerly the Randolph Oilers — played the Plymouth Rocks at Marciano Stadium there were signs the city would support semi-pro football again.

But perhaps the big reason why the Pros flopped and the Oilers will survive is the payroll — the Oilers do not have one, while the Pros payroll reached unreasonable proportions.

It's unlikely the Oilers will attract the caliber of players the Pros did, but the Eastern Football League has a written rule against playing players.

So, anyone playing for Brockton, Middleboro (Cobras) or Plymouth (Rocks) is playing because they love the game — not to pick up some extra cash.

Jack Hopwood, now living in Florida, was a sports fanatic. When he ran the Pros he did everything top shelf. Many of the players he brought to Brockton were one step below professional capability. But, the Pros got so good most games weren't a contest and the once-big crowds dwindled to nothing. Of course, the Pros needed the crowds to pay their players, so it was no surprise that Hopwood took a financial bath.

Now, after 19 years, the Eastern Football League has a team in Brockton and with franchises in Middleboro and Plymouth there should be some exceptional interest.

Led by Randolph's Peter O'Kane, the Brockton Oilers have started off on the right foot. Close to 1,000 people paid their way into Marciano Stadium on a muggy July night. The only complaint I heard was the game's starting time (8:30) was too late. Many people brought youngsters and left at the half or in the third period of the game won by Brockton, 13-0. The Oiler management should consider moving the starting time to 7:30 p.m.

And, a couple of former area high school stars, Brockton's Mike Delancey and Southeastern Regional bull running back Ed Nelson should also help create some area fans. In their final days, the Pros became so talented they

reached out to all parts of New England for outstanding college players, who as I said before were a shade below pro potential.

Brockton has been without semi-pro football since the Pros became defunct in 1965, after several outstanding seasons under the coaching expertise of Bob Teahan and Jack Sarson, two of the best high school coaches in the South Shore.

If the new organization maintains a good level of competition and tries to obtain area talent there's no reason why it can't survive and pay its bills. We like O'Kane's philosophy. "We don't buy anything we can't pay for."

That is sensible because I'm certain O'Kane & Co. are not about to start using their Master Charge or Visa Cards to buy equipment. The gate prices are reasonable for both adults and youngsters and the quality of entertainment is good.

Perhaps the crowds may drop somewhat when high school football begins in mid-September, but at least the Oilers don't have to worry about the Red Sox keeping people glued to their TV sets.

In fact, O'Kane and Coach Vin Sykes should bow to the East at least four times a day before sunset and chant: "Thank you, Don Zimmer...thank you, Skip Lockwood and friends."