

"Friday night football in the EFL  
is **real** football."

-ED PENN, Randolph Oilers



The Quincy Granite prepare for their season opener tomorrow night against the Boston Cowboys.

BERT LANE photos

# Lunch-pail football

EFL players compete for love of the game

By MICHAEL J. STOICO  
The Patriot Ledger

**I**f there's anybody that embodies the spirit of what it means to play in the Eastern Football League, it would have to be Chris Torem.

The 16-year veteran linebacker is the league's all-time sack leader.

"He gets off of the ground and looks back to make sure there's no body parts missing that need to be sewed back on," Randolph Oilers coach Ed Penn said.

After years of wear and tear on his body, Torem is making this his last year in the league as he finds himself on the wrong side of 35. But there will be no shortage of players willing to take his place.

Since 1961, the players in the EFL have been inflicting physical harm — on themselves and others — and gladly strapping on the pads to take another season's worth of punishment for no pay whatsoever.

"Friday night football in the EFL is real football," Penn boasted. "There are no egos, just the love of football. It's a working man's league."

"These guys do this for the love of the game and they are committed to football," Quincy Granite coach Ken McPhee said. "We have 35-40 guys show up every week at practice because they are so dedicated."

Quincy and Randolph, the two local teams in the 14-team league, make their season debuts this weekend. The Oilers open at 8 tonight against the Charlestown Townies at Randolph High School. The Granite host the Boston Cowboys at 7 p.m. tomorrow at Veterans Memorial Field in Quincy.

As much as Torem is a symbol of what the league is all about, Penn, his coach, also knows what it takes to survive in the longest surviving amateur football league

in the country.

He has been involved with the EFL for 21 years as a player and a coach. The offensive lineman started playing in Taunton and in 1987 moved to Randolph, where he was part of the franchise's only championship in 1990. While his playing days were nearing an end, Penn's love for the sport didn't wane.

"At 35 years old, my body wasn't holding up any more," Penn said of his eventual shift to offensive line coach.

In 1998, he took over the head coaching reigns and has been trying to get back to the championship game ever since.

As for McPhee, the former North Quincy High football coach, he has been working with the Granite since their inception in 1999.

"Our team is still pretty young and we are getting better every year," he said. "This is a good league and there isn't a lot of trash talk, just a lot of blue collar guys who love the game."

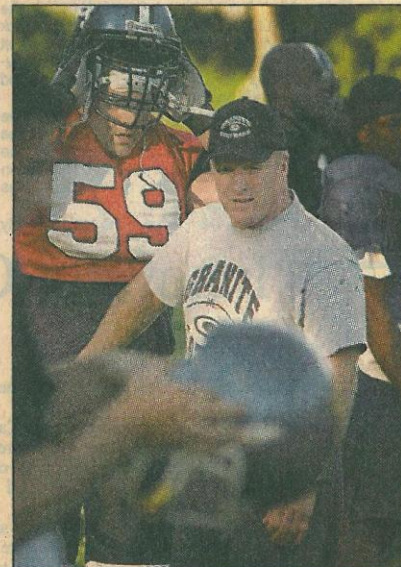
The Granite and Oilers will be gunning to dethrone the Marlboro Shamrocks, who have been defending their championship for 10 straight years.

"Marlboro and Middleboro are the class of the league and we're hoping to get there with them," McPhee said.

Granite president Paul Doherty is optimistic about the season and the future of the league.

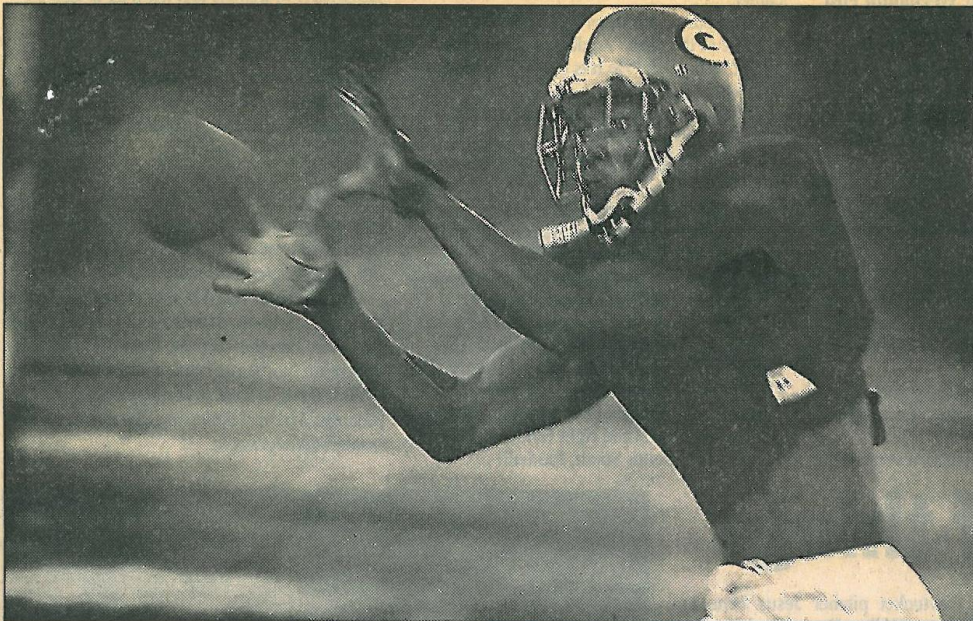
"It's been around and it's a tribute to the league that it continues to thrive," Doherty said. "You can be any age and any type of guy and as long as you love football, you'll have a chance to play. We get lawyers, construction workers and tunnel workers."

"We look really good and we have a great offensive line and a great quarterback."



Coach Ken McPhee has been working with the Granite since their inception in 1999.





Dwyane Williams is on the ball at a Quincy Granite practice.

BERT LANE photo

# EFL players love the game

## ■ EFL

Continued from Page 25

As to who will be at quarterback is a question mark, since the Granite have three strong candidates.

Mike Thomas is an accomplished signal caller who had a superb career playing for the University of North Carolina. He holds the school's records for most passes and most yards. At 28 years old, he has a lot of football left and last year even earned a tryout for the already-defunct XFL.

"He's a leader and he's played at a high level," McPhee said. "He's one of the best players that I've ever coached. He understands offenses and he knows how to read defenses. Mike is extremely elusive and he has great arm strength."

Two 25-year-olds, Liam Higgins of North Quincy and Brendan Deyer, also in the mix.

"(Higgins) can control the ball with the best of them and he has a quick release and he makes good reads. They (Higgins and Thomas) are both capable of starting," McPhee said of the 6-3, 225-pound Hofstra graduate.

Tailback Jackson Vetiak has impressed his coach with his quick feet and looks to be the primary ballcarrier.

"He's elusive and he has great break away speed," McPhee said.

Vetiak will be running behind what McPhee calls "our best offensive line in years" as they have Ronnie Pierre-Louis, Jim Charles, Mike Zawilinski and Alex Malafi.

"This is the first year that we've had this line," McPhee said. "Our line has always been undersized."

The Granite defense will include free safety John Skabeikis (11 interceptions last season), linebackers Ryan Craig and Sean Halpin, and defensive lineman Dave Harris and Al Casey.

"We'll be competitive," said McPhee, who guided Quincy to a 6-4 record and a third-place finish in the Eastern Conference. "We've got to strive to be one of the better teams and we've got some new additions."

The Oilers, an Eastern Conference team that finished 3-7 last year, will be led by quarterback/running back Anthony Comer. The Eastern Conference Co-Offensive MVP is playing in his eighth season for the Oilers.

"His athleticism is unbelievable," Penn raved. "He doesn't know the strength of his own arm. I've seen him throw the ball 65 yards in the rain. He's one of the top three players in this league."

Running back Calvin Bryant will be making his debut with the Oilers this year.

"He has good speed and he's a great north-south runner," Penn said. "He always hits the holes and good luck catching him afterwards."

Wide receiver Mike Grew is another Oiler veteran, playing in his seventh year.

"He's our go-to-guy, when you need the effort to make the catch, Danny will be there," Penn said. "He's another athlete and he'll run the ball too."

Toren will be playing along side linebackers Larry Tegger and Rob Davenport, both of whom were EFL all-stars.

"Our defense is the bread and butter of our team," Penn said, "and our offense is going to light up the scoreboard. I'm optimistic and if these guys show up, we'll have a good chance of winning."

"Our motto this year is 'Don't sing it - bring it.'"

Michael Stoico may be reached at [mstoico@ledger.com](mailto:mstoico@ledger.com).

## Quincy Granite

July 7: vs. Boston Cowboys, 7 p.m.

July 13: at Randolph Oilers, 8

July 21: vs. Hyannis Hurricanes, 7

July 28: at Boston Cowboys, 3

Aug. 4: vs. Clinton Irish Blizzard, 7

Aug. 18: at Randolph Oilers, 7

Aug. 25: at Central Maine Storm, 4

Sept. 1: at Middleboro Cobras, 7

Sept. 8: vs. Charlestown Townies, 7

Sept. 22: at Massachusetts Havoc, 7

### All home games played at Veterans Memorial Field. Directions:

Off Route 93 (Southeast Expressway), take exit 8 for Furnace Brook Parkway.

Bear right off the exit and through the first set of lights onto Furnace Brook Parkway.

Proceed through next three sets of lights. At fourth set of lights, take a left onto Hancock Street (Route 3A).

Veterans Field will be on the right just after the MBTA bus garage.

## Randolph Oilers

July 6: vs. Charlestown Townies, 8 p.m.

July 13: vs. Quincy Granite, 8

July 27: at Charlestown Townies, 8

Aug. 4: at Rhode Island Prowlers, 6:30

Aug. 10: Boston Cowboys, 8

Aug. 18: at Quincy Granite, 7

Aug. 24: vs. Hyannis Hurricanes, 8

Aug. 31: at Marlboro Shamrocks, 8

Sept. 7: vs. Middleboro Cobras, 8

Sept. 22: at Boston Cowboys, 3

### All home games played at Randolph High School. Directions:

Take Route 24 North to exit 20 (Route 139/East Randolph) and onto Mazzeo Drive.

Proceed approximately one mile. Just before Randolph center, turn right onto Highland Avenue.

The field is on the left, just behind the high school.