

Big graduation losses at perennial powers Meadville, General McLane and Oil City are giving Franklin a chance to move onward and upward in 2025.

With that in mind, sixth-year coach Matt Turk said, "If these kids gel, we should have a good season." The Knights were 2-8 and outscored 125-426 in 2024, but some solid building blocks were left in the playpen in the form of talented underclassmen at the skill positions to go with some sizable linemen. Turk hopes that formula translates into the program's first winning campaign since 2006 and its first non-losing season since 2015.

The marquee returnee would be junior running back Caiden Mincer, who ran 859 yards on 168 carries in 2024. That was the best rushing season for the Knights since Cody Cummings logged 907 yards in 2006, matching Sean Saunders' total from 2005. It was also one of the top six rushing campaigns for Franklin this century, topped only by Zak Lynn's 1,085 yards in 2015 and 945 in 2014. Mincer, who scored 11 touchdowns, was rewarded for his efforts by making second team all-region.

Senior fullback Evan Steigerwald is also back along with wide receiver Jayden Wilmoth, another senior who has grown somewhat to 5-7, 185. Wilmoth caught 15 passes for 251 yards last season.

Turk can slot other talented athletes who at least played some last year at the other skill positions, including senior Eddie Maddox at quarterback. He's a runner/passers type. Sophomore Freddie Blackhurst, whose 2024 season was spoiled by a knee injury, can also play quarterback – along with running back, wing or wide receiver. Now fully recovered from knee surgery, he'll be in there somewhere.

Also ready to take the field at the skills are senior wide receiver Julian Johnson (6-1, 185) and sophomore Anthony Martin (6-3, 210) at tight end.

As for the interior line, the Knights feature three-year starter Kaiden Kiselka (5-10, 165) at center, junior Aaron Moore Junior and senior Jacob Riddle at tackles, and seniors Henry White and Ryan Taylor at guards.

Moore Junior is now a robust 6-6, 340. Riddle is 6-2, 285. White, a first-year varsity player, is 6-4, 230, and Taylor, who saw plenty of snaps last season, is 6-0, 220.

Adding depth are three sophomores: Evin Custer (5-10, 210), Carter Hutchinson (5-8, 188) and Devon Voto-Pelleiter (6-3, 234), who can play guard or tackle.

Considering their size, strength and the time they put in the weight room, "I think they should be good," Turk said.

The Knights also return senior Connor Ritchey, who booted four field goals and punted 50 times for a 37.5 average last season. "All things kicking, he's doing it," Turk said.

Defensively, Mincer and Martin will be at the ends with Moore and Riddle at tackles. Mincer shined on defense last year, too. Kiselka is a utility player who will be moved around.

Steigerwald and sophomore Luke Marsteller will be at linebacker. Blackhurst is the free safety. Wilmoth will join him in the secondary with Johnson and multi-sport athlete Joshua Rodriguez, a 5-8, 150-pound senior. Maddox also plays safety.

So, with the seismic shift in power in the region Franklin is hoping to rock some worlds this year. "We have a great opportunity to have a good season," Turk said.