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Web master

Back then, in 1922, the football seasons started much later than they do today.

The Oilers were scheduled to open Sept. 23 against a team of alumni; the Nursery, as the Knights were called then, began the season a week later on Sept. 30 against New Castle. Both teams were playing nine- to 10-game schedules at the time, their seasons lasting through Thanksgiving Day. And this was without playoffs.

Neither team was a ball of fire, although despite a 3-4-3 record, the Oilers would claim the Alpha Cup. Businesses and such from the four cities the schools were located sponsored the grand prize. Any team that laid claim to the cup for three years would get to keep it. Alpha was a Franklin organization.

Oil City won the prized trophy in 1922 despite a 19-0 loss to Meadville in its first Cup game. But the Oilers beat Titusville and Franklin (the first game the two teams played that season) to finish with a 2-1 record. They clinched the Cup when Meadville (1-1-1) tied Titusville (1-1-1) 7-7 on Thanksgiving Day.

Franklin finished 4-4-1, with the 0-0 tie coming to the Oilers on Thanksgiving.

It was hot out there

Getting ready for the season, the News-Herald reported in its Sept. 8 edition that the Nursery was practicing in 100-degree weather.

The paper also reported that the Nursery had a pair of 200-pounders in Rial Shaffer at 212 and Albert "Fat" Snyder, who tipped the scales at 250.

But have no fear, Snyder said. He predicted he would be down to 225 by the time the season started.

Tackling dummy goes down

Ten days later, on Sept 18, the News-Herald reported the following: "High schoolboys were smiling today over the attack which Rial Shaffer, 200-pound man, staged on the tackling dummy last Friday. The dummy had hardly been erected and given a preliminary tryout when Shaffer attacked it with all the vigor he knew. His great weight and the rush of his attack swept the dummy, cross-arm support and all, right to the ground.

"A bigger cross beam has been provided; that won't happen again," coach Bob Atticks said. Later Atticks predicted, "We will go into the New Castle game in fine fettle."

Not so fine a fettle after all

But, the Nursery would drop their first two games, 28-0 to New Castle and 46-0 to Warren, to extend their losing and scoreless streaks to 10 straight games. "Warren had a large number of rooters, including some co-eds," the News Herald said.

It was at this time that Herb Eckert began emerging as a star, beginning with Cambridge Springs in Week 3..

A 15-yard pass from Eddie Stewart to Ken Williams gave the Franklin its first TD since 1920 before Eckert scored on runs of 71 and 70 yards. Franklin poured it on with King Richardson adding a 25-yard touchdown and Harold Cunningham returning a punt 80 yards for another score.

Where are you guys?

There was a big to-do at the start, however. Kickoff was scheduled for 2 p.m. at Miller-Sibley so the Blue Devils could catch the Erie train at 4:38, but, and to the surprise of FHS officials, they arrived by car two hours late, and the game didn't start until 4 p.m. Atticks didn't know they were driving to the game until noon when they still hadn't arrived and only after he called the Cambridge Springs principal.

The reason they were late is they had to go through Titusville since the Meadville-Franklin road was closed.

Meanwhile, Oil City's season got under way with a 0-0 tie with the Alumni and a 37-3 romp over Youngsville in which Spood Olmes ran for two TDs and threw for another. Ray Vaughn, who would go on to star at Colgate, also hit paydirt twice, once on a 50-yard Pick 6 (although they weren't called that then), and a 19-yard run by Fred "Fuzzy" Moore.

On the day – Oct. 14 – Franklin was ending its scoring woes against the Spa, Meadville was blanking Oil City, 19-0, in its Cup debut.

The next game was Oil City vs. Franklin on Oct. 21. The Oilers thrashed the Nursery, 32-6, as Olmes scored two more touchdowns and passed to John "Red" Foley for another. Foley had at least four catches for 79 yards, and Dick Cleaves averaged 40 yards per punt, some going as far as 60 yards, according to The Derrick.

Speaking of Cleaves, the whole town was agog with his brother Jack's exploits at unbeaten Princeton, which Grantland Rice famously dubbed "The Team of Destiny."

Sorry to digress...Franklin's only touchdown came on a 1-yard run by Stewart with Eckert's 79-yard burst setting it up.

Veevo – whatever that means

"During the 10-minute armistice between the halves, the students of the Oil City schools staged a snake dance over the field and kept up an incessant din with their various yells and songs. Franklin responded with a 'veevo,'" the News-Herald reported.

Oil City won only one other game after that – 7-0 over Titusville on Nov. 25. Olmes threw a 55-yard touchdown pass to Art Clinger with 2:30 left and future W&J star Stew Wilson added the extra point. His dad, W.S. Wilson of West Third Street, told young Stew that he'd buy him a suit if "he kicked a goal."

And, oh by the way, the Oilers didn't play Titusville in 1921 due to some "sort of squabble" between the two schools.

Aftermath – two different directions

Strangely, it was all downhill after that for the Oilers. They were walloped by Warren, 26-0, and lost 7-6 to Greenville. They played Warren a second time and tied the Dragons, 7-7, but then lost to Grove City, 13-0.

Franklin rebounded from the loss to Oil City with a 52-6 romp over Parker's Landing in which Eckert amassed more than 300 all-purpose yards. He scored three TDs, one on a 90-yard interception, another on a 50-yard double pass and the third on a long double pass. Richardson scored a TD and passed 28 yards to Richard Kirker for another. Kirker intercepted two passes, including one that set up a run around end for a touchdown by right tackle Ralph "Moon" Buck. The Nursery didn't stop there, although they dropped a 6-2 decision to Titusville, despite INTs by Kirker and Eckert. They easily won their next two – 30-0 over Meadville and 19-0 over Greenville.

Eckert does it again

Eckert scored three touchdowns against Meadville on runs of 25, 30 and 40 yards. His 60-yard punt return set up another plunge by Richardson. Kirker blocked a punt for a fifth TD. Eckert rushed for at least 218 yards on 11 carries.

Then against Greenville, Eckert ran for at least 106 yards on eight attempts and the aforementioned "Fat" Snyder blocked a punt and recovered the ball in the end zone for a touchdown.

So now the Nursery was on an upward trend, while the Oilers apparently had already peaked and were in a downward spiral heading into the Thanksgiving Day showdown.

A special trolley was lined up to take Oil City fans to Franklin. It would leave Center Street at 1:30 p.m. The round-trip cost 50 cents.

Muddy ending

They arrived to watch the two teams battle in ankle-deep mud. "(All the players) left the field carrying about 100 pounds of mud," the News-Herald reported.

Franklin at one point did reach the Oil City 8 only to fumble.

And so ended the 1922 season.

Eckert led the Nursery with eight touchdowns and Richardson, who would be prominent in the Franklin community as an adult, added three and totaled 19 points.

Olmes scored 37 of Oil City's 89 points. He scored six touchdowns and threw three scoring passes. The fleet Vaughn, just a sophomore, added three TDs for coach George Woodman's crew before heading to Colgate.

Woodman came to Oil City from Colgate where he was one of the school's all-time greats, starring at center. He left Oil City after the 1925 season for Clairton where he built one of the state's great high school football dynasties, one that still thrives at last glance.