

The Oilers appear to be just one big question mark this season.

Gone is their trademark big and menacing offensive line; back are some pretty good players here and there.

“No idea,” coach Dan York answered when asked about the team’s prospects this season. “We’ll have to wait and see. We have a tough schedule. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

York will begin his ninth season at Oil City after spending 17 years at Lakeview. He’s known for punishing tailbacks running behind crack offensive lines.

But graduation wiped out last year’s line so this year’s rebuilt version will revolve around senior Caleb Sparks (6-2, 240), who played tight end in 2024, but has been moved to tackle, and junior Noah Lucarelli (6-3, 237), a returning all-region defensive player who will start at tight end.

Playing the guard beside Sparks is junior Lucas Wolf, who at 5-7 hasn’t grown taller, but has added eight pounds. The big claim to fame for the 266-pound Wolf is he has the school squat record, formerly held by Mario Fontanazza and then broken by Henry Milford, one of the many Cranberry students who have contributed greatly to the program. “He (Wolf) dead lifted 600, which is quite a feat,” York said. “And he did it as a sophomore.”

The center will be senior Carson Foster (5-10, 218), who did start three or four games in 2024 due to an injury to A.J. Bucholz. So there is some experience there.

The other side of the line will have junior Deryk DeLong (6-0, 200), who has put on 30 pounds, or senior Ashton Wagner (5-11, 223) at guards, but the other tackle is up in the air with junior Dominic Carson (5-11, 334) or probably sophomore Bradley Graham (6-2, 275). Carson has put on 20 pounds, Graham 30.

These are this year’s main players up front, and so far they’ve looked “OK – just OK,” York said.

They will be expected to take care of returning quarterback Cole Findlay, who was second team all-region after passing for 1,414 yards and 17 touchdowns. York would like to see improvement on that completion percentage (49%), though. For his career the 160-pound Findlay, an erstwhile basketball star at Cranberry, has collected 2,413 yards total offense, including 2,053 and 23 TDs through the air.

Actually, the top three quarterbacks on the depth chart are Cranberry kids. Junior Alex McIntyre (190) is a very capable No. 2, and Bryce Marchinke (5-10, 175) is a very talented freshman.

Oil City had a three-pronged unit at tailback last year, but it’s down to one with the return of senior Steven Heise. At 5-10, 182, Heise has grown a little and gotten a little faster.

Heise ran for 479 yards on 75 carries, No. 2 on the 5-6 Oilers behind then junior Dawan Cruz (102-492) and promising freshman Shia Sanchez (70-356), who missed the tail end of the season with an injury. Suffice it to say neither Cruz nor Sanchez returned to the team this fall.

So that means junior Dylan Van Wormer and sophomore Carter Thompson (5-10, 168) along with another soph, Aaden Hibbard, will get their snaps. York described Thompson as a “very good athlete.” Oddly, track star Van Wormer (148, roofing) and Hibbard (154, wrestling) have lost weight instead of putting it on.

The fullback will be veteran Brayden Buzard. Junior Lincoln Galla was to play fullback (and middle linebacker), but he is out for the season with a dislocated ankle. Sophomore Tycen Sindlinger (5-8, 190) and junior Blake Stevens are candidates here, too. Stevens was at guard and then tight end and now is a fullback/wing.

The wide receivers will be practically all new, with the exception of another veteran, Spence Singleton (5-11, 165), who has played some since his sophomore year.

Senior newcomer Landon Baker (6-3, 189) has emerged here after playing in the line as a seventh- and eighth-grader. He’s a basketball player at Cranberry. Another newcomer who offers speed galore is junior My’saun Mills (5-9, 131), a Pathways kid who hails from Aliquippa.

Also in the picture are junior Logan Heath (5-8, 150) and sophomore Carter Bialo, grandson of former Oiler distance runner Carl. Carter is 5-7, 132, but has good hands and is very quick, York said.

Still another soph, Landon Riley, will handle the kicking. He’s a soccer player and fast, according to York. Right now, the punting job belongs to junior Jaiden Watson, who has some good days – and some not so good ones, too.

## **Defense**

The two ends from last year, Lucarelli and Sparks, will be at tackle this year along with Wolf...and Graham and Wagner. Lucarelli made 44 tackles last season and was in opponents’ backfields often with five sacks and 10 tackles for loss. Sparks added a sack and seven TFLs.

DeLong, Baker and another newcomer, junior Abdul Stanton (5-11, 235) are the tackles.

Buzard (59 tackles) and Stevens (44) return at linebacker where they will team with Sindlinger. Backups are sophomore Alexander Piercy (5-9, 188) and freshman Clark Findlay (6-0, 185), who is young enough to be in the eighth grade, and poised to be The Running Back of the Future.

The secondary features Cole Findlay and Heise. Findlay was first team all-region last year after making 50 tackles to go with an interception and 10 passes defended. He is a three-year starter

in the secondary and has five career interceptions. Heise was second team all-region. His credentials: 39 tackles, three TFLs, three INTs, two passes defended.

Those two will be at safety, but Findlay will shift to cornerback if Singleton (39 stops, INT) plays there. Marchinke could also see some time here. "He and Clark Findlay are two great athletes for freshmen," York said.

Cornerbacks are Van Wormer, Heath and Mills, but Bialo and McIntyre are contenders here, too. "He put a heckuva hit on Heise (in practice). I'm impressed with Alex," York said.

In addition to linemen Tanner Kightlinger, Tim Walentoski, Kamdyn Reagle, Nico Blauser and Bucholz, the Oilers also graduated Gavin Stephens, Ben Garland, De'Vaughn Griffin, Hank Lockhart and Danny DeLong.

Oil City wasn't alone in big graduation losses. The usual powers, Meadville and McLane, graduated plenty, too, but York still expects them to be good along with non-region foe Mercyhurst (big line to go with Vinny Feliciano). York also mentioned Franklin having a big line to go with its star running back, Caiden Mincer.

So, we'll see.