

Seems like everybody, after hearing about the exploits of Ethen Knox, looks at Oil City and says, "Yeah, but they have that big line."

If they only new – because at Oil City, it seems like it's *a/ways* something.

Last year, two guys who started in 2021, both sophomores and one a potential all-star, quit the team. So coach Dan York was forced to go with his reinforcements – albeit beefy ones – and Knox went out and ran for 3,705 yards.

After graduating Cam Crocker, Jake Van Wormer and Logan Suttle, York expected to have Kevin Milford, Tanner Kightlinger and James O'Dell back in the trenches this season. But, alas, O'Dell is dealing with medical issues, so now only Milford and Kightlinger return.

And, wait, there's more. Hayden Wilson, who played linebacker and caught a big pass to loosen up a stingy Franklin defense last season, cut one of his toes off in a lawn mower accident this summer. That would make him highly questionable for 2023.

So, while the Oilers return the record-setting Knox, there's plenty on York's to-do list as they prepare for their home and season opener Sept. 25 against Warren.

Another item: finding a quarterback. Junior Gavin Stephens, who saw some action behind Dane Ley last year, is in the mix with Cole Findlay and a junior transfer (the name escaped York during this interview) who played for a couple of big schools in the Harrisburg area. York has always spoken highly of Findlay, but he tipped the scales at only 135 pounds last year. He's a little bigger now and may be ready to take a shot at competing for the starting job. "So we'll see what happens," York said.

York *kind* of hopes to complete more than the six passes the Oilers did last season. "We hope we can complete 12 this year," but he doesn't care that much. "As long as we're moving the ball and scoring points, I don't care how we do it," he said.

The Oilers will count mostly on Knox to move the ball, and oh, by the way, he also doesn't care that there are those who ask, "What coach would allow a kid to carry the ball 40 times a game?"

"It depends on what is working," York said. "I know (Knox) doesn't mind it. And I don't mind it."

Oil City also returns its I-formation fullback in senior Kevin Pearsall. Junior Noah Sanchez is available to spell Knox at tailback.

The receivers will be Jon Hargenrader, Hank Lockhart and whoever is not playing quarterback, Findlay or Stephens. Knox is a threat there, too. Senior Justen Dunkle will be used as a slot, "almost a second tight end," York said.

As for that line. In the mix (with last year's heights and weights listed) are senior Tim Walentoski (5-9, 235) and juniors A.J. Bucholz (6-1, 292), Lenny Leibold (6-0, 254) and Arik Kutchravy (6-1, 320) among the holdovers. Hardly pip-squeaks, at least. Walentoski, Bucholz and Kutchravy, especially, have put in their time in the weight room, York said.

Junior Cam Reagle (6-3, 286) is new and Niko Blauser (6-3, 265) played as a freshman. He was a Cranberry student and then last winter transferred to Venango Catholic where he played hoops and scored some points.

"We'll find out more next week," York said. He added, "We'll look good coming off the bus."

While Wilson is sidelined, the Oilers still return Pearsall, Dunkle, junior Ben Garland and Sanchez at linebacker. Quick-as-a-cat Hargenrader, Stephens and Knox return in the secondary. Lockhart will "be a strong safety/outside linebacker type of person," York said.

Dunkle was one of the team's leading tacklers last season, but missed the first part of 2022 with a medical issue.

Both Pearsall and Knox are approaching 200 career tackles and Knox has seven interceptions. The school record is 12. Pearsall will handle the punting again.

Placekicking is another tale of woe for the Oilers, who had a soccer player who showed promise, but got injured last year, and now has elected to not come out for the team this year.

So, the Oilers will be going to two unless they can find someone else.

Oil City lost 10 seniors from last year's 8-3 playoff team, also including LB Brayden McFetridge, WR Colin Zerbe and APB Carl Chelton.

York's assistants are Nate Neely, Marion Fontanazza II, Dave Skinner, Eric Cole, Ritt Smith, Tony Bucholz, Logan Way, Dylín Chapin, Jason Galla, Bundy Fulmer, Matt Miller and Cade Cochran.