

Randolph's rookie coach not afraid to think big --- Killinger debuts by sending Oilers at league champs

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RANDOLPH –

For many years Paul Killinger has toiled as a player and assistant football coach.

However, when he walks out on to the gridiron Friday night at Randolph High School Field, it will be as head coach.

Killinger, 45, will lead the Eastern Football League Randolph Oilers against the minor-league world champion Marlborough Shamrocks in the season-opening exhibition game.

"I figured it would be another few weeks before our regular season opener and I thought it would be good to give our players a game against the champions," said Killinger.

That is the way Killinger has been his entire football life.

He wants to go against the best head on.

Killinger was a four-year starter at Rockland High School (Class of '68) and earned a football scholarship to the University of Colorado. However, when his Selective Service Lottery number came up early in 1969, he entered military service before he was drafted and served in Vietnam.

When he returned to the United States, he entered Boston State College and played for its championship football teams of the mid-1970s. When he graduated, he played four years for the Oilers and another four years for the Middleborough Cobras of the Eastern Football League. For the past eight years, he has been a defensive coach for the Oilers.

Yes, he knows a lot about semi-pro football.

"It is a serious game," said Killinger. "It's not like over-30 softball or a no-check hockey league for adults. There is always the uncertainty and seriousness of injury. You have to be in peak condition to play football at this level and our players are serious about it."

Killinger, who works for Beacon Sporting Goods in Quincy during the days, splits his free time in the summer and fall between coaching in the Eastern Football League and at Hingham High School, where he serves as defensive coordinator.

"It can get hectic in late August and in September," said Killinger. "Last year for the championship game, we coached our high school game in the afternoon and then got in the car and drove straight to Maine for our game there. We got out of the automobile just in time for the kickoff." It is a five-nights-a-week job during the season. "We practice two nights a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays," said Killinger. "Then there is a game on either Friday or Saturday night. The coaches meet for a scouting session another night and then there is another staff meeting to wrap up all the loose ends another night."

Killinger and his staff and his players do not do this for financial reward. "Basically, it is a labor of love. We do it because we love the game," he said.

"You have to give the players a lot of credit. They have full-time jobs during the day, many have family commitments, and then they come to practice two nights a week to have me yell at them," said Killinger. "They certainly aren't here for the money."

There are considerable changes to the Eastern Football League this summer. The Charlestown Townies, long time members of the EFL and one of the oldest semiprofessional teams in America, disbanded. Another team to disband is the Mansfield-based Hockomock Colts.

The eight-team league has realigned into two four-team conferences. In the Chisolm Division, which comprises the southern teams, are the Oilers, the Middleborough Cobras, the Boston Braves and the Ocean State Buccaneers. In the Murphy Division, comprising the northern teams are the Marlborough Shamrocks, the Maine Sabers, the Merrimack Valley Outlaws and the Medway VWF Tigers.

The conferences were named in honor of George Murphy, currently the Commissioner of the Eastern Football League, and the late Lee Chisolm, the founder of the Eastern Football League.

Marlborough is coming off the best season in the organization's history. Not only did it win the Eastern Football League championship, it won the American Minor League Football Championship.

However, this year Marlborough is without several key personnel. Marlborough's head coach, Bob Brennan, resigned to become vice president of the Eastern Football League. "I think about six players are gone," said Killinger. The Shamrocks quarterback, Dave Palazzi, has signed on with the Canadian Football League's new franchise in Las Vegas.

"Our league has a number of quality players," said Killinger. "There was Lance Olberling, who played for the Oilers. He was drafted and was the last player cut by the New England Patriots last season. Word is Patriot coach Bill Parcells wants him back for another try this year. There are a bunch of players who have gone on to the Canadian Football League and Arena Football." A couple of EFLers are playing for the Massachusetts entry in the Arena Football League this spring.

This year there will be a familiar face returning at quarterback for the Oilers. Bobby Witt, who led Randolph to the EFL championship in 1990, is fully recovered from extensive knee surgery and will be at the helm.

Ryan Craig, who was a linebacker at North Quincy High School, is getting a try at fullback. Ed Penn, Tom Kirliss and Bubba Pina have been chosen as team captains. Between the three, there is more than 40 years of EFL experience.

They will make life easy for their rookie head coach.