

If it's what's up front that counts, Franklin, at last has some size.

Check it out:

C – Sophomore Kaden Kiselka (5-10, 215)

RG – Senior Noah Bruestle, a newcomer (6-0, 200)

RT – Senior Avery Shelter, (6-1, 290)

LG – Senior Jeremy Cunningham (5-10, 225) “He’s a dude,” says coach Matt Turk. “He. Is. A. Dude. Definitely one to watch.”

LT – Junior Jacob Riddle (6-2, 280) rotating with sophomore Aaron Junior Moore (6-3, 300)

TE – Senior Sam Wimer (6-1, 250)

“These kids have been growing up with me,” says Turk, who is beginning his fifth year as coach. “It’s the biggest line Franklin has seen in probably 10 years.”

Turk is hoping the line can spearhead a balanced offense that will have senior Landon Lynch (6-3, 160) at quarterback. Taking over for the sensational Cole Buckley, Lynch has some experience, throwing for 70 yards last season.

His main targets, in addition to Wimer, will be wideouts Freddie Blackhurst and Jayden Wilmoth, a pair of sophomores, and junior Julian Johnson.

Actually, not only did the Knights graduate Buckley, but they lost starting quarterback Jason Carey for the season when he sustained a knee injury during Week 3 after throwing for 491 yards. Carey was injured again last spring and underwent surgery. Turk expects to have the senior back by the second or third week this season when he back up Lynch and play some safety on defense.

The Knights also lost running back Toby Sanchez in the 2023 opener in the midst of a 105-yard outing. Sanchez hurt his knee again during track season, and Turk hopes he can return by Week 5 or 6.

In the meantime, sophomore Caden Mincer has the tailback job. He chipped in with 94 yards on just six tries last year. Senior Hunter Hedglin will help out in the running game, too.

The two defensive ends, Mincer and Cunningham, return from last year. They will be joined up front by Moore at nose guard and Kiselka and Shetler at tackles. Riddle will back up all three.

Wimer, Steigerwald and Bruestle are the linebackers with Hedglin at free safety, backup quarterback Eddie Maddox at strong safety and Johnson and Blackhurst at the corners.

Connor Ritchey, understudy for Nathan Pfenningwerth last season, will take over the kicking chores.

Another player Franklin will miss is sophomore Logan Knight. He's giving up the gridiron to concentrate on track, Turk said.

The Knights, 40 players strong, scrimmaged Girard on Saturday. "I'm pleasantly pleased with how well they've evolved through camp," says Turk.

Franklin was 4-6 last season – its best record since 2016 – but 4-1 after an 0-5 start.

"We don't want to go backward," Turk says. "Everyone playing has experience, other than the two newcomers. We want to build off that."

The Knights open Saturday at home with Mercer, no easy task since the Mustangs have a big line and a running back reminiscent of former Oil City star Ethen Knox. "We have a challenge Week 1," Turk says.