

Undoubtedly, the question on everyone's mind when it comes to Oil City High School football is: Who is going to replace Ethen Knox at tailback?

So there will be no further suspense, the answer is – drum roll– senior Danny DeLong, at least for the time being.

DeLong probably won't make anybody forget Knox, who lit up the scoreboard and stuffed the stats sheets with his career 92 touchdowns and 7,870 yards rushing.

"We don't have the speed that we had with Ethen" says Dan York who will begin his ninth season as coach of the Oilers. "(DeLong is) not fast, but he's got quick feet."

DeLong would have been in a battle with another senior, Noah Sanchez, who is just a bundle of bad luck. Sanchez was Knox's understudy at tailback, but sustained a season-ending injury in the first game and has since shattered a knee cap after slipping while fishing. That's probably going to cost him the basketball season since it's going to take eight months to heal.

The Oil City roster, which now stands at 60, took a hit earlier when some Pathways kids left for various reasons. Included was 6-2, 220-pound Trenton Grooms, a sophomore who would have been the starting tailback. Grooms played some varsity defense last season as a freshman, starring in the playoff finale against Sharon and finishing the campaign with 30 tackles.

Also gone are senior Sean Alexander with 722 all-purpose yards last season and another would-be running back from Farrell.

So, DeLong's backup looks to be sophomore Dylan VanWormer ("small, but quick and tough") and freshman Shia Sanchez – but he, too, is hurt at the moment.

The Oilers will have a slightly different look on offense as junior Cole Findlay has grown slightly to 5-11, 155. But, says York, "He's quick, very athletic and ripped." He's also the second-fastest player on the team next to De'Vaughn Griffin, who happens to be the fastest guy in District 10.

Findlay was the starting quarterback last year when the Oilers went 7-4 and made the playoffs. He threw for 639 yards and finished with 743 yards total offense and 891 all-purpose yards, making four INTs on defense.

York teams usually pass only three or four times a game, but that could increase to 10 this season with Findlay and wide receivers Gavin Stephens and Griffin, both seniors on the field.

Stephens, who can also play quarterback, made second team all-region last season after catching 11 passes for 255 yards, and Griffin picked up 443 all-purpose yards. In Saturday's 5-0 scrimmage showing over Ft. LeBoeuf, Stephens had five catches and Griffin three, including 50- and 40-yarders.

The 130-pound Griffin has a hand-held 4.4 40 to his credit.

Others who will see action at the skill positions include returnees Steven Heise (QB/TB/WR/LB), Spence Singleton, Ben Garland, Brayden Buzard and Hank Lockhart along with newcomer Dawan Cruz.

The Oilers are still mixing, matching and trying to figure things out its usually sizable offensive line, which is led by senior Tanner Kightlinger, who was first team all-region last season. Two more returnees, seniors A.J. Bucholz and Tim Walentoski, were second team all-region, but expect to see Walentoski at tight end.

Senior Niko Blauser, another interior lineman, could see action at tight end, too.

Senior Kamden Reagle, junior Caleb Sparks and sophomore Lucas Wolfe (5-6 or 5-7, 250, but “a powerhouse,” York says) also figure in the plans up front, along with newcomer Noah Lucarelli, plus Matt Gregory, Carson Foster, Xander Black and Dominic Carson. Jude Vogan could see action at center.

Lucarelli will start on the defensive line with Kightlinger Walentoski, Reagle and Bucholz.

The linebackers will be Garland (50 tackles, 4 sacks), Buzard (48) and DeLong. Aaron English is a backup here.

Joining Findlay (7 passes defended) in the secondary are Stephens (8 PDs), Singleton, Heise, Griffin, Lockhart and Cruz.

Lockhart will handle the kicking duties, but, as usual, look for the Oilers to go for two after touchdowns.

York (55-29) isn't sure what to expect this season, but noted that Meadville does have a lot back from its region championship team.

The Oilers open the season on the road Friday against Harbor Creek.