

Oiler seniors determined to enjoy more success in 2017 football season

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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WOOD RIVER—When the 2016 Illinois High School Association football season began, the program at East Alton-Wood River High had hopes for better days. The Oilers last made the playoffs a decade earlier.

Thanks to a dedicated overall team and a hard working group of juniors, EAWR experienced a big turnaround, going 6-3 and clinching a playoff berth on the final day of the regular season. Although the Oilers lost to Carlinville in the first round, there was much to be proud of.

That dedicated group are now seniors, and are now prepared to help take the Oiler program to new heights.

“I can't say enough about our seniors,” EAWR head coach Garry Herron said about his returning group. “They're putting their pride aside and put the team first. That's all that I can ask for.”

It starts at quarterback, with Justin Englar at the controls of the Oiler offense. Englar threw for over 900 yards last season, and combines great passing ability with speed to run when necessary.

“Justin can throw the ball, and he can run it too,” Herron said. “And he's very football smart.”

Running backs Gabe Grimes and Zach Womack both bring speed and toughness into the Oiler backfield. Grimes is the back who can grind it out, while Womack possesses speed, and can get the tough yards when needed.

“Gabe is a bowling ball type,” Herron said. “He's strong and is a bruiser. Zach has speed and quick feet, and he can rough it between the tackles as well.”

T.J. Lawson moves from the backfield to wide receiver in 2017, and has the speed to get outside and gain big yardage. Brayden Young will move into the backfield, and is a very elusive runner.

“T.J. has speed and the ability to get outside quick,” Herron said, “and Brayden cuts very well, sees the whole field and can explode when the time is right.”

Both on and off the field, the Oiler seniors have shown exceptional leadership qualities, not only mentoring the younger players in practice, but also excelling in the classroom as well.

And Herron, a former Oiler player himself who also enjoyed success, is very proud of the Class of 2018 for how they've grown as players and helping to establish the revival of the EAWR football program.

“It's really a joy to come to practice every day, and see these kids grow for the last three years,” Herron said. “It's just been awesome.”

The story of the 2017 football season remains to be written. And the Oiler seniors are very determined to write a successful final chapter that adds to their legacy of how they helped return the EAWR program to prominence in both the Metro-East and St. Louis areas.