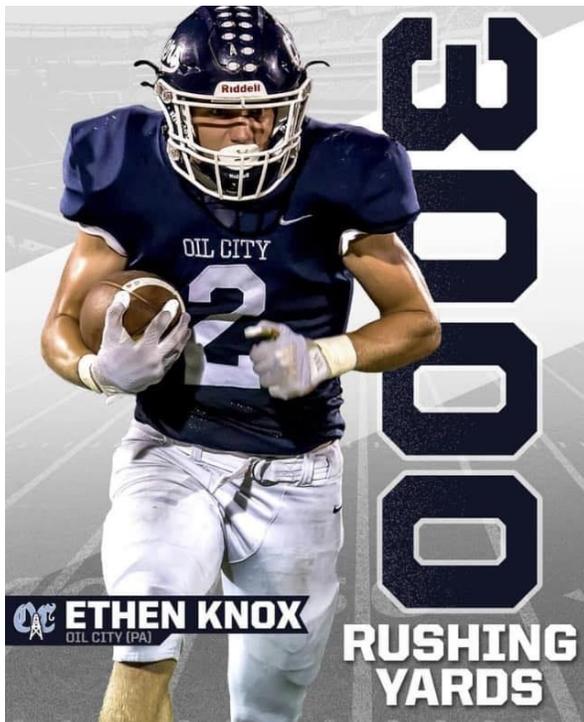


By Mike Kilroy

exploreVenango

Ethen Knox's heart pounded as he lined up at running back for the first time.



The Oil City football team was on the road at General McLane. The fans of the home Lancers were in full throat, and Knox was waiting for the Oilers' first offensive snap of the game.

The sophomore, making his first varsity start at a brand new position, was supposed to get the ball.

He didn't.

Instead, he and quarterback Dane Ley collided in the backfield, the football hitting the turf.

A very bad start to what turned out to be a breakthrough game and season for the powerful and speedy Knox.

"We had a miscommunication on the first play because it was just so nerve-wracking for us," Knox said, chuckling.

e can laugh about it now. Later in the game he scored on a 65-yard run and finished with 187 yards on 25 carries to begin his career as a running back.

The Oilers lost that opening game, but bounced back to win the next week over Conneaut. A young Oil City team was 3-2 before losing its final three games to finish 3-5.

Knox showed throughout the season that he is going to be a handful to contain for the next two years.

Not bad considering he didn't even know he would be a running back until a few weeks before the season. In fact, he was listed on the Oil City roster as a wide receiver.

“Honestly, I didn't even know what position I was playing,” Knox said. “My freshman year, I played wide receiver on the JV team — I didn't get any varsity time. Over the summer, before my sophomore year, the coaches actually were thinking of putting me at quarterback, but then we had a couple of practices and they had me run the ball a little bit. They just decided that they'd start me at running back.”

Good decision.

Knox used his size — 6-foot-1 and 175 pounds — speed and unexpected quickness to rush for 1,825 yards and 14 touchdowns.

“The first couple of practices I was just getting used to being a running back,” Knox said. “I really liked it. I was fine playing wherever, as long as it helped the team.”

Knox has packed 10 more pounds on his frame without sacrificing speed. If anything, Knox has gotten even faster.

As a sprinter on the Oil City track and field team in the spring, Knox ran a time of 11.29 seconds in the 100-meter dash.

“I may not be as shifty as other backs, but I get up field,” Knox said. “I’m going to try to run with more power this year. I try to do a little bit of everything.”

He certainly did last season against arch rival Franklin.

Knox rushed for a school-record 484 yards.

He had a 359 yards in the first two quarters.

“Someone told me at halftime that I had a lot,” Knox said. “But, I really wasn’t focused on it. I was just trying to focus on winning and helping the team.”

Knox also rushed for five touchdowns in the 54-8 win.

This year, Knox wants more Ws — even if it means fewer carries.

He was very busy last season with 253 attempts in just eight games. That's an average of nearly 32 rushes every Friday night — a huge workload for any back.

Knox said he realizes for Oil City to be more successful, the offense will have to be more diverse in 2022.

“Last season, the whole team was super young,” Knox said. “I don't think we did as well as we all were hoping for. I think this year we're going to build on last year.

“I think last year, one of the things that kind of hurt us, actually, was teams at the end of the season were just game-planning against me because they knew I was gonna get the ball constantly,” Knox added. “They were trying to shut that down. I think the coaches have been looking into tweaking the offense a little bit so we can do more things.”

Knox's success at running back last year ignited a desire to play football at the next level. Also a standout in basketball and on the track and a sprinter and discus thrower, football is clearly his favorite sport right now.

“I think that's kind of the endgame for me,” Knox said. “To try to make a college football roster one day.”