

*(Editor's note -- Pat Patterson died March 18, 2022. The OCHS football field has been renamed and a plaque has been installed at the entrance booth in memory of Pat Patterson.)*

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One thing about the Oil City community: it loves its high school football championships. The town was oh-so-enthusiastic about the Oil City High School Oilers' recent success. Before that, there were others, albeit fewer and farther between.

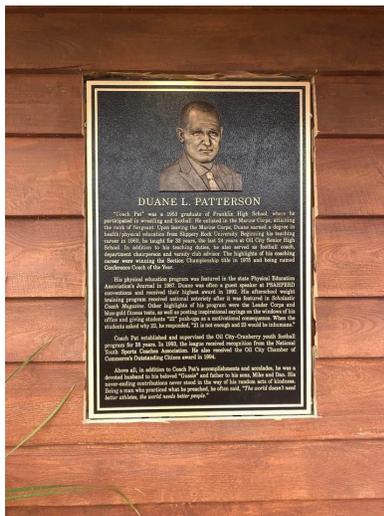
Back in 1975, the Oilers were coming off a 1-8 season. They lost to Franklin 62-6 at the Oil Field in which the quarterback threw five interceptions, three of which were returned for touchdowns. It was the most lopsided game in the then 79-year-old history of the rivalry.

Entering the 1975 season, Pat Patterson, beginning his seventh season as coach, had only five returning starters. And none of his players weighed more than 200 pounds.

But, as it turns out, no matter.

The Oilers had heart. And enthusiasm. They had more players who weren't winter sports participants turn out for off-season weight training. The enthusiasm for summer conditioning was "the greatest since I've been at Oil City," Patterson said at the time.

And when they weren't getting in shape, they were painting the locker room blue. They hung up a sign that read "Set the Pace."



"This was our war-cry during pre-season," Patterson said at the time. The team voted to have no captains, just the 19 seniors leading the squad, and no outstanding player awards.

It all ended with Oil City's first Section 2 title since 1964, and its first victory over Franklin since that same year. The final record of 7-3 included close losses to two Mercer County foes – 16-13 to Grove City in the opener and 7-0 to Hickory during Week 4. The Oilers also lost to Curwensville, a team added to the schedule at the end of the season, 29-8. (Patterson, after looking at the film, said they were going to be tough, and well, they were.)

Between Grove City and Hickory, the Oilers beat Corry and Elk County Catholic, a sub for Reynolds, which Oil City also beat during an unusual Week 3, 1-0, due to a teachers' strike.

Then came a four-game winning streak that really ramped up the town.

· First was a 15-14 decision over previously unbeaten Warren, the Section 2 champion the previous two years. Mike Enos threw a 30-yard pass to Scott Dawson on a third-and-17 play with less than a minute to play, and then connected with Tim Higbee for the PAT to put the Oilers ahead. Gary Frantz tipped a Warren pass and Chris Hale made the interception on the last play of the game to seal the victory. Higbee made three catches for 45 yards on the winning drive.



· Next the Oilers came from 14 points down in the fog to beat Meadville, 27-14. Frantz, who rushed for a career-high 182 yards, scored on runs of 76 and 23 yards to put the Oilers ahead. Jim Watkins, a transfer from Meadville, ran the PAT after Frantz's first TD.

· Oil City clinched a tie for the Section 2 title with a 20-0 win over Titusville. The game was played in a continuous downpour. Frantz scored three TDs and rushed for 165 yards.

· The Oilers wrapped up the title with a 30-7 win over Franklin in which Enos – victim of the five INTs against the Knights in 1974 -- threw for 205 yards and 2 TDs and 3 PATs and Frantz rushed for 101. Frantz and Higbee each scored two TDs.

That victory also ended a few years of near misses against Franklin. There was a 0-0 tie in 1970, a 15-6 defeat to the first of two FHS unbeaten (9-0) teams in 1971 and even a 28-6 loss to the Knights in 1973 in which the Oilers held speedster Buzzy Scott to 13 yards. Patterson's flare for the dramatic came through afterward, "...we stopped Buzzy, and we stopped the triple option, but we just didn't stop them."

For the record, the Oilers were no match for that second Franklin unbeaten team in 1972. Coach Joe Stewart's Knights ruled, 53-0.

Not only were the 1975 Oilers devoid of 200-pounders, but, Patterson said, they didn't look "mean." At the end-of-the-season banquet at the Vo-Tech, he had each of the different units – offense, defense and special teams – stand up so everyone could see how "unmean" they looked.

Frantz and tackle Joe Frawley were the heaviest players at 195.

Gary Frantz was a terrific athlete, one of the greatest in OCHS history. His 1,900-plus career yards rushing still ranks in the top 10 all-time. He was a regional champion in wrestling and in track, he ran the sprints, long-jumped 21 feet and could throw the discus 150.

Frantz would become a four-year starter at fullback for Clarion – and once helped the Golden Eagles to a conference championship in wrestling filling in for injured All-American heavyweight Chuck Coryea. Patterson once said that had the 5-10 Frantz been 6-2 with the same physique, he could've played linebacker at Pitt.

Even though they won the S-2 crown and finished third to Greenville and Hickory in the Northwest Athletic Conference, the Oilers had only two first-team all-conference players: Frantz and center Ken James.

Enos and Higbee were second team. Split end Scott Dawson and defensive lineman Joe Tommasi received honorable mentions. Those players all made the Section 2 all-stars along with offensive linemen Tom Mock and Tim McFadden, defensive lineman John Brown, and Hale and Randy Lamb defensive back.

NWAC coaches showed Patterson some respect, though. They named him Coach of the Year.

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A footnote to this story: Current coach Dan York was a starting lineman for Oil City in that 62-6 loss to Franklin in 1974, and was at the helm of the 2018 team that posted an even more lopsided triumph: 73-7 -- as Patterson looked on from the OCHS press box.