

Long or Short, Quarterback Has Finesse

By GRANT GLICKSON

When you are 17 years old and capable of heaving the football more than 70 yards, you are naturally inclined to want to throw the bomb. Asad Abdul-Khaliq, who has the ability to go long, prefers instead to go the short-yardage route.

"Any quarterback who has the arm should be able to go up top when a man is wide open," he said. "But when you have to put it where the wide receiver is the only one who could get it, that's the pinpoint accuracy that I love."

At 6 feet 2 inches and 190 pounds, Abdul-Khaliq, of Elizabeth (N.J.) High School, has all the qualities of a big-time college quarterback. His touch on short- and medium-range passes and his ability to throw on the run are the reasons Boston College, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan State, Ohio State, Wake Forest and West Virginia are recruiting him.

"There aren't too many quarterbacks out there who could put most of their passes on the money like he does," Elizabeth Coach Jerry Moore said. "I don't care if it's 5 yards or 55 yards, the ball is always where it's supposed to be. He has great touch, and that's something that you can't coach."

Quasim Abdul-Khaliq, the player's father, said: "From the age of 3, whatever he threw at he could hit. That is something that he was born with."

By age 7, Asad Abdul-Khaliq was already under center for the Elizabeth Giants, a Pop Warner team founded by his father and other volunteers.

"I'm glad that the Elizabeth Giants came along, because it kept kids off the street," said Abdul-Khaliq, who has one younger sister and three stepbrothers. "They drove around and made sure players weren't doing the wrong thing. They called houses and made sure kids were keeping up on grades. They took kids on trips, and they were the people to go to when you had a problem. I call them my uncles."

The Elizabeth Giants also laid the groundwork for Abdul-Khaliq's promising career. "We taught him from an early age that sometimes a quarterback is going to get whacked," said his father, who was a high school basketball player at Elizabeth, which was called Jefferson at the time of his graduation in 1975. "It's important that you complete the pass and not compromise the receiver's route. We also taught him early on that if you're not holding the ball, you don't have to worry about getting hit. That's why he has such a quick release."

When Abdul-Khaliq was 10, he started throwing passes to an older



College scouts like the skills of Asad Abdul-Khaliq, who has sparked Elizabeth's 4-0 start in New Jersey. George M. Gutierrez for The New York Times

cousin, Quinton Spotwood, a former receiver at Elizabeth who is now a junior punt returner and receiver at Syracuse University.

"Quinton was a big help in my maturity because I was so far ahead of the guys my age, they just couldn't catch my balls anymore," said Abdul-Khaliq, who is leaning toward Wake Forest as his college choice because of its modest size. "So I had to go to the highest level that I could. With Spotwood, I was able to get my timing right so that I could see how fast a high school wide receiver would be at a senior age."

Even with his modest performance (5 of 13 for 76 yards) in Elizabeth's 21-7 victory over Union (2-2)

on Friday night, there is little doubt that Abdul-Khaliq has learned his lessons well. He has completed 49 of 66 passes for 715 yards and 8 touchdowns in helping Elizabeth (4-0) achieve a No. 4 ranking in the state.

In 1996, he completed 74 of 124 passes for 1,619 yards and 16 touchdowns.

"He's one of the best we've ever had," said Moore, who has coached 65 Division I players since coming to the school in 1984. "He reminds me of Dan Marino. He's so accurate, and he has that quick release."

But Abdul-Khaliq is more a student of Joe Montana, who retired from the National Football League after the 1994 season.

Abdul-Khaliq said that he has studied so much tape on Montana that he feels comfortable comparing himself to him and knows exactly what Montana would do in every situation.

"He always had the confidence in tight situations," Abdul-Khaliq said.

Like Montana, Abdul-Khaliq reads defenses well, often checking off at the line and hitting the third and fourth receivers while standing in the pocket until the last conceivable moment.

"My team rallies around me," he said. "If they see me all hyper and losing my cool, they're going to lose their cool. So I have to keep my composure. Not just for me, but for