

Muhammad rockets after early choices

By Todd Cooper
Senior Reporter

Freshman wingback Abdul Muhammad didn't go near the bullets from gangs in East Los Angeles, Calif., where he grew up.

He was too busy being compared to other projectiles.

Muhammad earned the nickname "Little Rocket" on the football field, not far from the streets where gangs roamed in Compton.

"There were a lot of people who played sports that would still gang-bang and do drugs at night," Muhammad said.

Muhammad, meanwhile, was earning comparisons to former Notre Dame star Raghieb "Rocket" Ismail.

"Ismail wore the same number, 25, as me," Muhammad said. "I had worn that number ever since I was little, long before I even knew about the 'Rocket'."

"I guess they looked at me and saw my moves and compared me to him." And for good reason.

Ismail, at 5-foot-9 and 170 pounds, runs the 40-yard dash in 4.2 seconds. Muhammad, at 5-foot-9 and 152 pounds, runs a 4.4-second electronically-timed 40-yard dash.

The true freshman has used his agility and that speed to rocket to third on the depth chart, behind Nate Turner and Vincent Hawkins.

Although comparisons to Ismail are premature, receivers coach Ron Brown said the freshman is remarkable.

"Rarely does a guy out of high school come in and have the ability to play as a freshman," Brown said. "It's even more amazing when you think that he's a wingback at one of the toughest positions to learn on the field."

"He's picked things up so quickly, it's amazing."

Muhammad said he was startled when he found out he'd forsake his redshirt year.

"Coming in as a freshman, I definitely didn't think I would be playing," he said. "I thought I'd have to sit out and gain some weight and learn the system."

Muhammad said he grasped "the system" while working with senior wingback Nate Turner.

"A coach can teach you a lot," Muhammad said, "but a player that's been there before helps out a little more."

And it did help him to move into

the third spot.

"In a way, I think I did surprise the coaches," Muhammad said. "They expected me to catch and run well, but they didn't expect me to block this well."

Muhammad chose Nebraska over Miami, Southern Cal, UCLA, Oregon and Texas-El Paso after catching 55 passes for 855 yards and 18 touchdowns as a senior. He also ran for 300 yards on 30 carries. And he broke former New York Jet Wesley Walker's prep record with 143 punt-return yards in a single game.

"I didn't block a whole lot in high school because I had the ball so much," Muhammad said. "So the coaches really didn't see that until I came out here."

Brown said Muhammad's blocking has moved him up to third on the depth chart.

"He's a very tough little guy," Brown said. "He's going against 200-pound plus guys and he's only 152 pounds. But he's very wired up and very explosive."

Muhammad said he only showed a glimpse of his explosiveness in the second scrimmage of this fall. His performance in the intra-squad game helped move him up the depth chart.

"It was all right," Muhammad said. "I got my first catch and I made a couple of big blocks."

Brown said Husker fans can expect to see a lot of Muhammad.

"He'll play regularly this year," Brown said. "I wouldn't take him out of a redshirt year if I can't see him playing a significant role."

Muhammad said he won't be nervous when he first takes the field Sept. 7 against Utah State.

"Before games, I'm so busy preparing, I don't have time to get nervous," Muhammad said. "For some reason, I never have."

That could be because of the area he came from and what he's been through in Los Angeles.

"I don't know," Muhammad said. "My mother and my brother stayed behind me, telling me to stay out of (the gangs)."

"I'm glad I did," Brown's glad to have him.

"He has the potential to be a very, very special player," Brown said. "If he works hard and plays consistently throughout his career, then, he'll have the chance to be in the caliber of 'Rocket' Ismail."

Opener

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one which has carried the Huskers to two consecutive Final Fours.

"I would expect that we'll be playing a little of both kinds of offense this weekend," he said.

On Tuesday, Nebraska will open its Big Eight schedule at Missouri. Last season, the Tigers finished seventh in the conference and 9-20 overall.

"Missouri has been one of the weaker teams in the conference," Pettit said. "But I do know they did have a very good recruiting class last season."

Revered coach dies of cancer

By John Adkisson
Staff Reporter

When the Nebraska volleyball team takes the court against Wisconsin Saturday, the Cornhuskers will be facing a team that just lost its best friend.

Badger Coach Steve Lowe, 35, who guided Wisconsin to a Big 10 Championship and an NCAA Regional berth in Lincoln last season, died last weekend of lung cancer.

While undergoing tests in July that found a blood clot in Lowe's ankle, the lung cancer also was diagnosed. Shortly after, he was admitted to the hospital and began undergoing chemotherapy treatments.

Assistant Coach Margie Fitzpatrick, named interim coach for this season, said Lowe's passing has stunned the team and the volleyball community.

"Steve worked very hard and touched so many people," she said. "The outpouring of support from the people of Madison (Wisc.) and the athletic department has been incredible."

Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit said Lowe was "a friend and exceptional coach."

"While we lost a friend and a peer," Pettit said, "we can have a great deal of empathy for his players and coaching staff and what they have had to endure."

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