

Estacado QB Tennison steps up to lead role

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A-J Media



Jaleen Tennison begins his third season as Estacado's starting quarterback. (Zach Long)

Recalling the pitch of Jaleen Tennison's voice as a sophomore makes Estacado coach Danny Servance chuckle.

"It was a little bit high pitched," Servance recalled, erring on the generous side of his assessment.

"Durand Williams — Jaleen's father — offered a more descriptive, if not candid, version of how Tennison sounded in the huddle during his first season as the Matadors starter compared to the tone he's developed prior to the start of his senior year.

"He went from sounding like Michael Jackson in the huddle to understanding that everyone has to hear you," Williams said. "I used to ask him, 'is Michael Jackson playing out there? Who's out there? He's grown a lot.'"

"It's not just the strength of Tennison's voice that has grown. He meandered onto the scene in 2012 by telling teammate Kenaris Jackson that he was extremely nervous before his first varsity start. When it was over, he had 154 passing yards, 101 rushing yards and three combined touchdowns.

"His junior season cemented his status as a dual threat by scoring 17 combined touchdowns, 1,085 passing yards and 650 rushing yards.

"Now, he started a recent interview by volunteering that he and his teammates were immature at times in seasons past, losing focus and lacking discipline.

"If focus isn't the biggest hindrance to the District 1-4A DI favorites and their quarterback this year, will playing without Robert Johnson be?"

Johnson was the Matadors superb four-year varsity running back that tallied 2,232 yards and 31 touchdowns as a senior and is currently playing at Northwestern Oklahoma.

"Somebody has to step up and take his place," former Estacado coach from 1975-2000 Louis Kelley, a close friend of Servance, said. "They may not be as good as Johnson was. I think that if there's somebody waiting to take that spot, I think they'll step up. You can't worry about Robert Johnson because he's not here. You have to worry about what you have."

What they have is four players that are vying for the precious depth chart space that will indicate who gets the majority of snaps next to, or behind, Tennison in Estacado's new pistol scheme.

"We're getting a little more serious than last year in that we're not looking for a leader in the

backfield," Estacado running backs coach Clyde Wilson said. "Now, it's up to others that want to step up and be vocal. Especially the quarterback being serious and serious in the classroom and in the hallways will make the team successful."

The multiple back formation will give the big Matador runners chances in space since so much attention will be committed to Tennison.

Ukedrian Anderson (6-2, 185 pounds), Craig Busby (6-2, 190 pounds), Ave'On Williams (5-10, 205 pounds) — Tennison's brother and a junior transfer from Slaton — are all competing for touches along with the lithe David Smith (5-8, 150 pounds), who shined in a call-up against Perryton in last year's playoffs.

Estacado won't see Shallowater, Cooper or Andrews in district play this year. Instead, they'll play newly introduced Borger and Pampa as well as Levelland and Seminole.

"I think a lot of people don't understand how tough this district is going to be," Servance said. "I've known (coach Kent Jackson) for a long time, he's coming from Coronado to Seminole. He's always done a great job. Then you've got (Pampa coach) Grey Poynor. Borger is so athletic, too. I saw them in track and field last year. I was impressed with their kids and the type of speed they had."

Tennison's aggressive use of his athletic skills is what makes him so dangerous and will make him the focal point of the Estacado film that will soon circulate among area coaches. It's also what can cause concern, particularly with his ball carrying.

"His game plan is just give me the ball, give me the ball, coach," Durand Williams said. "You need a yard? Give me the ball."

But Servance — who played at Odessa Permian and Baylor — wouldn't have switched his offense from a shotgun heavy system to the intricate pistol formation with multiple options without having confidence in Tennison's development.

The system based on misdirection requires discipline to execute playfakes, hold linebackers, direct supplemental players and improvise in tight space.

"I think we're going to see (Tennison's) leadership increase," Servance said. "He's been a little bit immature as far as that part of his game is concerned. In order to make this work, you have to have a guy back there that's an extension of the coach."