

HIGH SCHOOLS

Malvern's Price catching big praise

By TED SILARY
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FOR A GUY who runs precise patterns, Joe Price certainly followed a circuitous route to pass-catching stardom.

We take you back for a glance at Malvern Prep's 2005 freshman football team . . .

Price was there, all right. But one had to look long and hard to find him with a ball in his hands. At that time he played running back. Third string, that is. And he kind of got lost in his pads: His height was 5-8 and his weight was stick-figurey.

"I gave it some thought," he said. "Being so skinny, I knew there was no way I'd ever get to play running back for varsity. I wanted to play and I thought my hands were all right, so I switched to receiver."

Talk about catching on!

Gaspare "Gamp" Pellegrini, who's in his 31st season at Malvern and 42nd total at three schools (also long-gone St. Thomas More, and St. Joseph's Prep), calls Price his best-ever receiver.

"We've had some good ones," he noted, "but nobody like *this* guy. All you have to do is get it in his neighborhood. If there's one-on-one coverage, really, my instructions to [quarterback] Billy Conners are just, 'Throw it up there for him.'"

"When Joe was in 10th grade, he'd give the cornerbacks a hard time in practice and I'd yell at them. I didn't know what I had. Then Joe came back last year and right away it was, 'Oh my!' Now, he's bigger, stronger and faster with those same great hands."

In that last sentence, the most important word is *bigger*.

Price now goes 6-3, 185. Yes, he has added 7 inches.

Every so often, he sees the older brother of a current teammate and that guy insists on making the same comment.

"It's like you're 8 feet tall!"

Deep down, perhaps Price feels like that. But he's known around Malvern for his modesty and quiet nature.

During a 15-minute interview, conducted in the gym before Wednesday's practice, whenever Joe was pressed for more details about his meteoric rise, his face kept turning the color of star rusher James Connelly's hair — red.

When asked what he has learned while watching NFL receivers, he paused and shot back, "I've learned what *not* to do."

He continued: "A lot of them are showboating. I don't showboat. I just hand the ball to the ref. That's my personality, and I don't think there's any need to celebrate or do any dances."

For a 9-1 squad, with Syracuse-bound Ryan Nassib doing the

throwing, Price last year caught 29 passes for 551 yards and five touchdowns. In just four games (all wins) this season, he already has produced 449 yards (career total 1,000 on the nose) and six scores on just 18 snags (24.9 average).

Price runs a 4.45 40 and is quite the leaper, too.

"He can windmill dunk," noted Conners, who's headed to Duke for lacrosse.

Work habits? No problem.

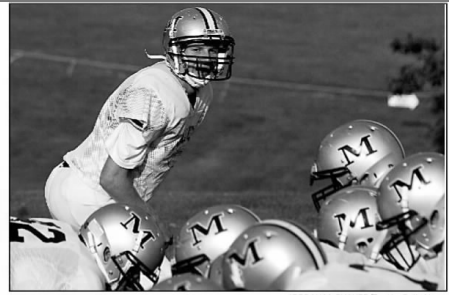
"After practice the other day," Pellegrini said, "I looked back to the field and saw two guys running sprints with parachutes behind them. Joe and Billy. I should have known."

The Friars, who are averaging 41.3 points, open Inter-Ac League play tomorrow by hosting fellow unbeaten Episcopal Academy. The offensive starters aside from Price, Conners and Connelly are rushers Neil Willis and Rob McCabe (one lines up at wingback), tight end CJ Mooney, tackles Dave Umile and Bobby Panchisin, guards Mike Corlidge and Joe DiTrolio, and center Matt Devlin.

Receivers, even the great ones, are afforded limited chances to stand out.

"Doesn't matter to me," Price said, smiling. "I enjoy blocking just as much."

Price, who lives in Havertown, played his CYO football for St. Denis and enjoyed some decent running-back moments. His dad, also



JORDAN M. SHAYER/For the Daily News

Switch to receiver was good choice for Malvern's Joe Price (back).

named Joe and a Malvern grad, was "all for" the switch to receiver.

As for this generation's Joe . . .

"I had confidence," he said. "I never thought I'd be where I am now, though. Just kind of happened. All of a sudden . . . It's all been through hard work."

"I get a lot of my confidence from my teammates. When we're in the huddle and Billy's coming back with the play call, they'll say they want the ball to go to me."

As a sophomore JV player, Price, a backup, scored all of one touchdown. It came on a long toss from Conners. In the first varsity scrimmage of '07, he hit paydirt on a bomb from Nassib and allowed himself to dream. Well, at least a little.

Now, schools such as Temple, Delaware, Lehigh and William & Mary are expressing interest in the 3.3 student with a 1,090 SAT score. Once senior-season

game tapes go out, those early birds will find themselves in a flock of pursuers.

Price, who also makes spot appearances at cornerback, treasures everything about the wide-out experience — from sizing up d-backs to running the patterns to battling for possession.

"I *love* jump balls," he said, beaming.

Though Malvern's basketball coaches would love to see him resume playing that sport, Price said he intends to run winter track before battling for a job as a starting pitcher. His dad hurled for Malvern and St. Joe's.

Meanwhile, when Price's height was increasing on what seemed like a daily basis, didn't he realize?

"Well, in 10th grade," he said, "my knees used to hurt. I guess because of growth spurts."

Now, the rising is done by his stats and the pain is felt by those trying to cover him. ★

2008 Joe Price article

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