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Man With A Plan

The NFL views him as a cornerstone at quarterback, but Andrew Luck has designs on other matters first: a degree in architecture from Stanford and further rebuilding of the Cardinal's image

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It comes with the territory. Top-shelf college quarterbacks are expected to enter the lair of Jon Gruden, the former NFL coach whose maniacal mien on the sideline earned him the nickname Chucky, after the villain of the *Child's Play* movies. Now an analyst on *Monday Night Football*, Gruden moonlights as an inquisitor and scold of future high picks on his ESPN pre-draft show *Gruden's QB Camp*. "This is disrespectful to Notre Dame," he chided Jimmy Clausen last year while screening an especially egregious interception. "Disrespectful to the quarterback position."

With his decision to forgo the 2011 NFL draft to play another season at Stanford, Andrew Luck did more than stick a thumb in the eye of conventional wisdom, thrill his extended family on the Farm, catapult himself to favorite status for the Heisman Trophy and vex a wide swath of draftniks and sports-talk bloviators, many of whom seemed downright affronted by Luck's

decision. (*Does he not realize he could get injured? Does he have something against capitalism?*) The 6'4", 235-pound redshirt junior also postponed by a year his date with Gruden, a meeting that most likely wouldn't faze Luck much after his recent encounter with a far more formidable inquisitor.

Chucky, meet Charles.

Charles Renfro is a partner at the internationally acclaimed architectural firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro, which was selected by Stanford in April to create a 90,000-square-foot arts center. Luck is majoring in architectural design, a program in the university's school of engineering. He took two studio classes last quarter, one of them taught by John Barton, director of the architecture program. One of the major projects Barton assigned his students—"It's actually a bit harder than I should be teaching," he says, without sounding remotely sorry—was to design their own versions of that arts center.

"At the beginning of the quarter we were given a blank site," Luck recalls. "It was like, 'O.K., here's your program. It's 90,000 square feet. Come up with something.' So you gotta delve into it, think about it, go through your process. You mess around, make some models. I guess you could equate it to coming up with a game plan. You look at a defense, find out what [your team] has done before, find out what other people have done, look at the precedents, find out if there's anything new or different to consider."

In a coup for Barton, Renfro agreed to spend a couple hours on May 3 critiquing the students' projects. Luck had made a series of models and sketched—by hand and on a computer—a pair of three-story structures. Between them were glass studio spaces positioned to allow sunlight to shine down to the basement of the arts center. "I had myself mentally prepared to get ripped up," Luck recalls, "but it was really constructive."

An arresting figure in his defiantly rumpled, wide-striped suit and stridently pink socks, Renfro complimented Luck and the two other students in his group on their "programming" and also spoke approvingly of a strategic "knuckle," or juncture, they'd designed. He noted "a disconnect" between the curved roof and the building—"something I was working on as recently as last night," said Luck recently, as he sat at a table outside the Yang and Yamazaki Environment and Energy Building, powering through a panini. When a visitor described that building as palatial, Luck shared a minor misgiving: "But there's not much of a *discovery* inside. You know that sensation you get when you turn a corner in a building and you're pleasantly surprised; you find something you weren't expecting—like a shroud being lifted? That's the discovery."

Here is the discovery likely to be made by Chucky (not Charles) about Luck: His gracious, unimposing facade conceals a leader and motivator every bit as effective as any face-mask-grabbing, alpha QB. Befitting a future franchise quarterback, Luck displayed the full array of physical tools the position requires in guiding the Cardinal to its finest-ever season. (Stanford went 12--1 in 2010, capping the year with a 40--12 smackdown of Virginia Tech in the Orange Bowl.) But he also showed that when he wasn't deflecting credit or interspersing his remarks with a goofy laugh—more of a guffaw, really—to signal he's not taking himself too seriously, the cerebral Luck is also comfortable using more blunt, and sometimes blue, language to get a point across to his teammates. "He'll raise his voice if necessary," says Chase Beeler, Luck's center for the past two seasons, citing his fiery halftime oration in last year's USC game. "But his leadership has more to do with this aura around him. When you've got someone that talented, poised and confident, the poise and confidence rub off."

Elliot Allen was Luck's coach at Stratford High in Houston. "Everybody wants to talk about what he can do athletically," the coach says. "But with Andrew, the it factor is his knack for making people better, making them want to follow him. He wants his teammates to have success, wants them to get the credit. I've never seen anybody like him in that respect."

To make his point, Allen recalls how some college recruiters watching Spartans practices raised questions about Luck's arm strength. What they didn't realize was that Luck was tailoring his throws. "If he was going to one of his better receivers, he'd zip it in there," says Allen. But if the pass was intended for a teammate who didn't catch quite as well, "Andrew would take something off it, although he would never admit that, because he wouldn't want to embarrass that kid."

Jim Harbaugh recruited Luck to Stanford and mentored him for three seasons before taking over the 49ers in January. He echoes Allen. "The cool thing about Andrew," Harbaugh says, "is that he makes himself small, and builds up everybody else around him. Of course, by doing that, he makes himself huge."

Long before he helped fill stadiums, Luck was smitten by them. His interest in architecture was spawned overseas. His father, Oliver, now the athletic director at West Virginia, played quarterback for the Mountaineers from 1978 through '81, setting school records for career touchdown passes, yards and completions. In his final year in Morgantown he won the Louis D. Meisel Award, given to the student-athlete with the highest grade point average.

To understand how the son could walk past a stack of cash totaling in the tens of millions and think to himself, "Hmmm, maybe later," it helps to read the résumés of his parents. A second-round draft pick of the Houston Oilers in 1982, Oliver played five seasons in the NFL. During that time, he earned his law degree, cum laude, from Texas—taking many of his classes at night, *during the NFL season*. His wife, Kathy, also earned her Juris Doctor at Texas, having already received a master's in social work from the school. Says Oliver, "We've tried to teach our kids that it's fun to stretch your mind, to challenge yourself intellectually."

When his football career ended, Oliver did a yearlong legal fellowship with the government of what was then West Germany. His mother, Gisela Steppuhn Luck, is a native German who moved to the U.S. after World War II. Oliver visited that country frequently while growing up and came to speak the language fluently. In 1990, when the NFL launched the European-based World League of American Football, or WLAF—"One of the more unfortunate acronyms in history," Oliver says with a smile—he was quickly hired as general manager of the Frankfurt Galaxy. He, Kathy and one-year-old Andrew moved to Germany.

By 1998, Andrew had three siblings: Mary Ellen is now a sophomore at Stanford and a defensive specialist on the women's volleyball team; Emily will be a senior at Morgantown High; and Addison, Andrew's little brother, is entering the eighth grade. How often does Andrew see Mary Ellen on campus? "Whenever she needs my car."

The young family traveled extensively in Europe. It was nothing for the Lucks to hop on the autobahn and "spend the weekend in Paris, drive down to the Alps or the Riviera or London," says Oliver. "We had no idea what the kids were absorbing. But in retrospect, Andrew must have spent a lot of time looking at the buildings."

Stadiums in particular. In '95 Oliver became the president of WLAF, which would eventually become NFL Europe, and moved the family to London. They lived just a five-minute commute from Arsenal soccer club's since-closed Highbury Stadium, a stylish, ancient venue, which Andrew recalls as a "beehive set down in a residential area."

He saw games in London's old Wembley Stadium (since razed) and at Düsseldorf's horseshoe-shaped Rheinstadion, among others. "For the longest time, in middle school and high school, I wanted to build stadiums," Luck says. "I was infatuated with them."

He remains so. That becomes apparent when he recalls a recent trip to Seattle with Oliver. After taking in a Sounders soccer game at Qwest Field, they

walked over to neighboring Safeco Field to watch the Mariners. "That part of Seattle is industrial," Luck recalls, "and the design of both stadiums—all the strong lines, very powerful, all the truss work—was just perfect for the area."

When the design of a stadium leaves him underwhelmed, he's far too tactful to say so. Usually. "Historically, it's very interesting," he says of Notre Dame Stadium. Yes, but what of its design? "It's a bowl."

Playing soccer across the pond as a boy, Andrew cultivated both a Euro's passion for the sport and certain skills that carried over to American football. Both father and son attribute some of his superb footwork on the gridiron—his nimble five- and seven-step drops, his ability to slide and shuffle to find passing lanes, his speed when the pocket collapses—to all that time dribbling a ball around the pitch. By the time Andrew was 12, the family had relocated to the Houston area. In 2005 Oliver was hired as president of the Dynamo of the MLS. Andrew loved soccer and loved the Dynamo, which won the MLS Cup in its first two seasons. But that other brand of football was calling him.

It was highly unusual for a sophomore at Stratford to win the job as starting quarterback. But when Luck showed up, "it was no contest," Allen says. The idea was to spoon-feed the offense to the kid and not overwhelm him. "But he picked it up so fast," recalls Allen, "that after four or five games, we just put in the whole playbook."

Late in his first varsity game the Spartans needed to sustain a drive to salt away a victory. Allen was stunned to look onto the field and see Luck shouting in the huddle, exhorting his teammates—all upperclassmen—to find a way to secure the victory. "I remember thinking, This kid *never* talks," says Allen. "It turns out, he does. He just picks his spots." Stratford won that game, and Luck won over the team.

Asked to list Luck's five best plays, Allen demurs. He remains in awe of Luck's performance against Cypress Falls—"a team we had no business being on the field with," he says—in the second round of the 2006 state playoffs. Luck threw for 339 yards and four touchdowns. "Andrew was just...superhuman. He made every throw. We ended up losing by a missed extra point. Just watching him that day was special."

Nate Nakadate, on the other hand, has no problem pinpointing what was, in his mind, Luck's greatest hit: "I had Andrew for AP literature his senior year. In the middle of the year, he turned in a critical essay on *Hamlet* that just...blew me away." More than three years later Nakadate still raves about the job Luck did

"explaining Hamlet's evolution of inner torment and eventual loss of faith and heart," as well as juxtaposing the Danish prince's "rational versus irrational thoughts."

A high school English teacher for 10 years, Nakadate seldom discussed football with Luck, correctly intuiting that the subject of his passing prowess made him uncomfortable. "There wasn't an ounce of hubris in him," the teacher says. "He didn't want to talk about how many touchdowns he'd thrown; he just wanted to do the work at hand."

A succession of big-name coaches made the pilgrimage to Stratford: Alabama's Nick Saban, LSU's Les Miles and Oklahoma's Bob Stoops, among many others. Luck basically told them thanks, but no thanks. He was more interested in playing at a school that might offer him more of an academic challenge.

Meanwhile, Stanford coaches were scouring the country for very good football players with killer test scores. Here is first-year coach David Shaw's version of what the Cardinal staff was looking for: "You go into a school, and the head coach says, 'That's my best player and my team leader.' Then you meet the guidance counselor, and the counselor says, 'I wish I had 10 more students like him.' That's our guy. But you need to hear it from both of them. If you hear it from one and not the other, that's not our guy."

Luck was their guy. On the day he arrived at Stanford, Oliver helped his son move items to his room. They walked into an empty dorm with a baby grand piano in the lobby. "Some student was playing it," Oliver recalls. "The guy sounded like Rachmaninoff. He probably plays with the New York Philharmonic in the summer. And I thought, Welcome to Stanford."

Barton, who taught one of Luck's studio classes last quarter, is also his academic adviser and, as it happens, a Cal grad. "So we give each other some s--- about that," says Barton. "But mostly, I try to be his adviser."

He had a eureka moment with Luck while reviewing a project with him earlier this quarter. "We were sitting in front of the computer," he recalls, "and I watched him juggling whole layers. He was seeing it in three dimensions—the program integrated with the architecture, the material integrated with the structure. He has a gift for seeing all these pieces at once, breaking them apart and putting them back together again. And I thought, *That's* what he can do on the field."

Luck will play on Saturdays this season because he values, deeply, the experience he's having, the education he's getting. "This is a special place no matter how the football team is doing," he says. "It's

exciting to go to school here." Another major factor: the deep sense of loyalty he feels to the guys who, like him, took a flyer on a losing team. Scattered in various rooms on the same floor, mixed in with other students, are a dozen football players who came in with Luck in 2008: his roommate, the former walk-on and receiver, Griff Whalen; offensive linemen David DeCastro, Jonathan (Moose) Martin and Sam Schwartzstein; defensive backs Johnson Bademosi and Delano Howell; and linebacker Chase Thomas, to name a handful. These guys are exceptionally close because they all took the same leap of faith. Two seasons before their arrival Stanford went 1--11. The Cardinal improved to 4--8 in 2007, the first year under Harbaugh, who'd undertaken the football equivalent of a multiple organ transplant. A former NFL quarterback who'd played for Bo Schembechler at Michigan, Harbaugh replaced the Cardinal's "finesse" offense with a smashmouth scheme, then recruited hard-nosed, athletic players to make it work.

Around Harbaugh's third year at Stanford, something remarkable and unprecedented happened. The football team started beating up on opponents, physically dominating them, defeating their *will*. These sons of Ph.D.'s and professionals, this band of future doctors, engineers and lawyers, punished teams with a blue-collar style Harbaugh dubbed "class with cruelty."

No Stanford player better embodies that ethos than the gentlemanly Luck. ("He's always smiling on the field," notes his father, "even when he's getting drilled.") And yet, to see him fillet a defense is to witness an act of cold, clinical cruelty. Says Harbaugh, "What he does on the field—he's an assassin."

Following a fine redshirt freshman season in 2009 (2,575 passing yards, 13 touchdowns), Luck blew up last year, completing an absurd 70.7% of his passes for 3,338 yards, with just eight interceptions and a school record 32 touchdowns. The previous record was 27, held by Steve Stenstrom and some guy named Elway. "He's very smart, very good at reading the field," says USC defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin, who has 26 years of NFL coaching experience. "It seems like he's been in the league for six or seven years already. He was ready to come out this year. In fact, I was pulling for him to."

Surely, Luck would move on, right? The top pick in the 2010 draft, Rams quarterback Sam Bradford, had signed a six-year contract for \$78 million, \$50 million of it guaranteed. True, a new labor deal is likely to include a rookie salary cap. Instead of signing for an obscene amount of money, Luck stood to collect a sum that was merely...incredibly lucrative. But by staying at Stanford, he was leaving *stacks* of cash on the table. Remarkably, his decision to stay in school provoked a fusillade of criticism. He ran the risk of

catastrophic injury. (Luck is now insured for millions, in case of such scenario.) He might not play as well, depressing his draft stock.

Barton was struck by the blowback when Luck announced his decision. "A lot of people have a hard time with this," he says, "but Andrew is a student, then an athlete. He came here for an education. He's going to be a very good football player in the NFL. But after that, he's going to be an architect."

So Luck will not only earn his B.S. at one of the world's best universities, he'll also "complete the mission," as Harbaugh puts it, with a bunch of guys who bought what the coach was selling. Notwithstanding the current mess in which it finds itself, the NFL will probably still be there when he graduates next year. And it's not as if Luck is going to suddenly forget how to read a defense. "Andrew could go into a coma for five years," says former Cardinal cornerback Richard Sherman, who was drafted in April by the Seahawks, "and when he came out of it, he'd still be the Number 1 pick."

Luck is not Jake Locker, in other words. Projected by some as the first pick in the 2010 draft, Locker drove down his draft stock by returning to play his final season at Washington. (The Titans surprised many by taking him with the eighth choice this year.) But there is a wide gulf between them. Locker is leaving college as much more of a project than Luck, whom Harbaugh describes as "an NFL-caliber quarterback still playing college."

That, too, is the opinion of Mike Mayock, the former Giants safety who is now a highly respected draft analyst for the NFL Network. Mayock observed Luck at the Manning Passing Academy last summer and says he has "a pretty good feel for the kid." Mayock describes Luck's footwork as "excellent"; his arm as "not great, but very good—better than necessary to play in the NFL and make every throw." (As an aside Mayock says, "Arm strength is the most overrated factor in an NFL quarterback. I've never seen a kid throw a football like JaMarcus Russell.")

While many college quarterbacks play in various species of spread offenses, Luck has spent three years running Harbaugh's system—which Shaw will continue to use. "We run a pro-style offense," says Pep Hamilton, the Cardinal's offensive coordinator and quarterback coach. "We're asking Andrew to do the things that he'll be challenged to do at the next level. But we really ask more of him mentally—especially presnap—than what a large percentage of NFL teams ask of their quarterbacks."

"I don't care how great the physical skill set is," says Mayock. "If you don't have football IQ and work ethic in this league, it's way too complicated. I can't believe

what they're asking these kids to process and assimilate...in, like, 1.2 seconds."

But it is in those two areas—football IQ and work ethic—that Luck "stands out like a sore thumb," says Mayock. "He loves it; he's grown up with it. He sees the field; he anticipates. The ball gets out quickly. He knows what he's doing and why he's doing it."

"Whoever gets him will be getting a franchise quarterback. The owner will love him because he'll be the face of the franchise. The general manager will love him because he's such a safe pick. And the head coach will love him because he won't get fired."

There was no pomp, no stagecraft. Luck did not call a press conference, didn't issue a proclamation before an adoring throng of 500, as Matt Leinart had done at USC's Heritage Hall in January 2005. He did not reprise the '09 theatrics of Tim Tebow, who interrupted his exit from Florida's national championship celebration with this aside: "Oh, and by the way, one more thing: Let's do it again—*I'm comin' back!*"

When Luck decided to postpone pro football, he dictated a single, arid sentence, which went out on Jan. 6 in a press release. As the hulking DeCastro put it, "Andrew doesn't do fanfare."

The truth is that *Stanford* doesn't do fanfare. As a very bright person with an exceptional talent, Luck is very much the rule on this campus, rather than the exception. He is among his peers. "Actually," he says, "I'd say I'm on the low end of the totem pole."

There is no shortage of world-class athletes and intellects on the Farm. Golfer Michelle Wie lives four doors down from Luck. ("I didn't realize she was so *tall*," he says. "She is awesome: totally unassuming, nice, funny.") He and some teammates recently reported to the weight room for an early morning lifting session and exchanged smiles with Condoleezza Rice, who was just finishing her workout.

"[Olympic ice skating bronze medalist] Debi Thomas lived a very normal life here, as did Chelsea Clinton, for the most part," says Thomas Beischer, a history lecturer at the school. In his first year at Stanford, Luck took Beischer's art history 3 class and did well. "He finished in the top five percent of the class," Beischer recalls.

That class was a history of architecture, recalls Luck, "from the pyramids at Giza to Stonehenge all the way up to Frank Lloyd Wright and the Guggenheim. I might have messed up a couple of projects, but I

enjoyed it." The following year he decided to major in architectural design.

These days, Beischer sees Luck around campus or at luncheons hosted by the architecture department. "He's just a regular guy," the professor says. "We talk about architecture things. I see him in a very academic perspective. But I also see him through the lens of my eight-year-old son."

Sitting in Stanford Stadium last Oct. 9, young Zach Beischer looked distraught when USC took a 35--34 lead over the Cardinal with just 68 seconds to play. Beischer turned to his son and said, "Look, we've got Andrew Luck. I think we can do this."

He was right. Beischer's former student completed three straight passes and led the Cardinal into field goal range. Final score: 37--35. Stanford had Andrew Luck.

And now it has him back.