

Luck looks toward 2011 season without regret

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THIBODAUX, La. (AP) — Andrew Luck still has no regrets.

"I was happy with my decision," Luck said, reflecting on his announcement last winter that he would delay his NFL career and play one more season at Stanford. "I'm still happy."

Luck has had several months to let the consequences of his choice sink in — to think about the millions of dollars he could have earned this year, to wonder whether he should have taken Stanford's head coaching change as a sign that he, too, should move on, and to consider whether the possibility of injury presented undue risks to his earning potential.

Those questions still come up regularly from people Luck meets, and he smiles patiently before answering with a calm sense of certitude.

"I'm obviously aware of it, but hopefully I can be successful, monetarily, playing football regardless," Luck said while working as a counselor at the Manning Passing Academy in south Louisiana during the past weekend.

"I don't think my lifestyle will require whatever amount of money, not to say that wouldn't be good to have. I think we all know that."

This year was Luck's second-straight at the Manning camp, where he has gotten to know Peyton Manning, a prime example of a current pro who chose to stay in school over entering the NFL draft early, and who went on to an extraordinary career with the Indianapolis Colts.

"Every kid's got to make their own decision, but I do tell kids that if you want to stay ... it's OK to stay. I stayed," Manning said. "So I was proud of Andrew for making that decision."

"It's great for college football," Manning continued. "It speaks a lot about his school, about his passion for college football. I hope he has a great year this year, stays healthy. When the time comes, he'll be an excellent NFL quarterback for a long time."

Luck called Manning last winter before announcing that he'd remain in school, but noted that he had already made his decision and only wanted advice on how Manning handled his senior season at Tennessee.

"He said it worked for him," Luck recalled. "And I was happy with it myself. I don't think I needed affirmation from anybody, but it's always nice to see a man of his caliber go through maybe similar (circumstances). ... It makes you feel a little better."

Luck technically has two years of eligibility left, but expects to graduate with a degree in architectural design next spring and is treating 2011 as his final college season. He said completing his degree before turning pro is important to him.

"I didn't want have that looming, maybe in the future having to go back," he said.

As for the coaching change, Luck described a "smooth transition" in which the man who recruited him to Stanford, former offensive coordinator David Shaw, was elevated to the top job after Jim Harbaugh's departure for the NFL's San Francisco 49ers. Shaw has retained the same terminology and the same pass-oriented West Coast scheme.

Former NFL coach and current TV football analyst Jon Gruden, who also spent last weekend at the Manning's camp at Nicholls State, said Luck is the best NFL quarterback prospect he has studied, but understood why Luck chose to play one more year at a Stanford program he'd led back to national prominence.

"He's going to really have an opportunity to pilot the Stanford Cardinal to potentially a BCS game again and a national championship, and he's the captain of that outfit, there's no question about it," Gruden said. "Those are experiences that ... you just can't create very often."

Luck set school records for TD passes (32), completion percentage (70.7 percent) and passing efficiency (170.2) last season, when the Cardinal won the Orange Bowl. Stanford finished fourth in the final AP poll, the school's best

ranking since the unbeaten 1940 team finished second.

Luck was the runner-up in Heisman Trophy voting to Cam Newton last season and will be a favorite for the award in 2011. However, Luck said he won't place much emphasis on individual awards, and noted that a number of new Heisman candidates are bound to emerge this season.

Luck said he'll focus on being the leader he's expected to be by demanding hard work and accountability from both himself and his teammates, and he will try to keep the Cardinal focused on the task at avoid becoming distracted by the Bowl Championship Series picture.

"We avoid the national championship talk," Luck said. "For us, it's the Pac 12 championship. We figure if we can get there, we'll keep our fingers crossed and everything will be taken care of and our goals can be reached."