

# Andrew Luck's return boosts Stanford tickets

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Stanford's three-game football ticket packages are called the Lotsa Luck Mini-plans. Purchasers expect to see lots of Andrew Luck.

Lotsa Luck is also an accurate description of what befell the university's ticket and marketing departments when the quarterback announced Jan. 6 that he would forego the NFL draft in favor of one more season on the Farm.

Over the next two hours, director of ticket sales Rich Muschell and his staff took 125 deposits on new season-ticket sales.

"I couldn't get out of my chair," Muschell said Wednesday. "I was grabbing one phone after another."

The football advertising doesn't begin for a couple of weeks, but Stanford already has sold about 24,000 season tickets, up about 33 percent from last year's total of 18,000, he said.

Whatever the final number is by the time the Cardinal host San Jose State in the season opener Sept. 3, it easily will be a record for Stanford Stadium since the place was rebuilt after the 2005 season. Muschell said 98 percent of last year's season tickets were renewed, the highest percentage he has seen in 21 years in the ticket business.

At this rate, there could be more sellouts than there were in the five previous seasons since the reconstruction. Three games are certain to sell out, and they come in successive weeks: Oregon (Nov. 12), Cal (Nov. 19) and Notre Dame (Nov. 26).

If the UCLA (Oct. 1) and Washington (Oct. 22) games also sell out, Stanford would surpass in one season its previous sellout total of four since 2005. The sellouts were USC in 2008, Cal and Notre Dame in '09 and USC in '10. (The 2007 Big Game nearly sold out, but Cal returned more than 400 tickets too late for Stanford to sell them, according to a school spokesman.)

In terms of ticket sales, Stanford has weathered the departure of head coach Jim Harbaugh to the 49ers quite nicely. It helps to have the Heisman Trophy favorite, but the Cardinal also have enough of a supporting cast under new head coach David Shaw to rank as high as fourth in the nation in preseason prognostications.

A football program that had trouble drawing fans even with Toby Gerhart, the Heisman runner-up in 2009, now has plenty to sell.

"We've got a compelling team, a great stadium, attractive pricing and a guy who's arguably the best quarterback in the country," Muschell said. "It's pulling people in who never had a reason to be here before."

Stanford had all of those things last year, too, plus Harbaugh, but still there was often plenty of room to roam for fans at many home games, even against conference foes. It remains to be seen whether this season will draw more walk-up patrons to fill the sections that season-ticket holders don't.

Season-ticket prices range from \$199 to \$499. The \$240 family plans give two adults and two children end-zone seats for six games, excluding the Big Game.

The Lotsa Luck mini-plans cost \$70-\$149 and include one of the marquee games (Oregon, Cal or Notre Dame) and two other games. Single-game tickets go on sale Aug. 1.

One game unlikely to sell out is San Jose State. The Spartans haven't sold their allocation of 3,000 tickets the last three times they visited Stanford. The game is on Labor Day weekend, and it will be on local TV (Comcast SportsNet Bay Area). Additionally, the Stanford students won't be back at school, typically causing an attendance drop of 5,000.

When the stadium was rebuilt, the capacity dropped from 85,000 to 50,000. Despite this year's season-ticket frenzy, Muschell said he's happy with the stadium's capacity.

"There's a fine line," he said. "If it's too big, you don't have the scarcity factor to drive season-ticket sales. If it's too small, you're leaving money on the table. Where we have it pretty much hits the middle ground."

"I'm pulling my hair out trying to juggle people for Notre Dame. Would I like another 20,000 seats (for that game)? You bet. In the big scheme of things, I'm happy with it."

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