

# Trophy-hunting season on Farm

## Cardinal QB Luck is the 1st of his kind: a preseason Heisman favorite from Bay Area

Tom FitzGerald, Chronicle Staff Writer

Although the college football season won't start for a month, plans are already being made at Stanford for a parallel competition that won't be decided until early December.

That's when the Heisman Trophy balloting ends.

This year, for the first time in the memories of several longtime local observers, the clear-cut Heisman favorite going into the season comes from a Bay Area school.

Stanford's Andrew Luck finished a distant second to Auburn's Cam Newton last year in a duel of quarterbacks. Newton skipped his senior season to turn pro. By staying in school for his junior year, Luck became the odds-on favorite this year for the most coveted individual trophy in collegiate sports.

"I don't have to bang the drum real loud to get people to pay attention to Andrew Luck," said Jim Young, Stanford's director of media relations.

He's even reluctant to call what he and his staff are preparing a "campaign" on Luck's behalf.

"The only campaigning that's being done is by Andrew and the team on Saturdays," Young said. "We'll spend the other six days of the week trying to let as many people as possible know about Andrew's accomplishments and those of the team."

It will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed Luck's career that he's far more focused on team goals like the Pac-12 championship than he is on the Heisman.

"It means you're a good player on a good team," he said. "It's as much of a team award as anything else. It would be an incredible honor. It was an incredible honor just to go (to New York as a finalist) last year."

It will be the third year in a row that a Stanford player is a top contender for the trophy. In 2009, Stanford running back Toby Gerhart lost to Alabama running back Mark Ingram by 28 points in the closest race in the 76-year history of the award.

The Bay Area has had other contenders before, but they weren't the favorites going into the season. That includes the area's only Heisman winner, Stanford quarterback Jim Plunkett in 1970.

"Archie Manning (the Ole Miss quarterback who finished third) had the most flash and the biggest machine behind him," said Bob Murphy, Stanford's sports-information director at the time. "And, of course, Notre Dame was pushing (Joe) Theismann."

An Irish official famously changed the pronunciation of the quarterback's name from THEEZ-man to THIZE-man to rhyme with Heisman. It didn't help; he finished a distant second in the voting.

### Jensen chose baseball

Cal running back Jackie Jensen, who placed fourth in 1948 as a junior, might have been the favorite had he played his senior season. Instead, he signed a pro baseball contract and left school.

Craig Morton was an All-America quarterback at Cal as a senior in 1964. Navy's Roger Staubach was the favorite that year after winning the trophy the previous year. (Staubach's senior year was wrecked by injuries, and Morton finished seventh behind winner John Huarte of Notre Dame.)

After Plunkett, the closest a local player had come until Gerhart was Cal running back Chuck Muncie, second to Archie Griffin in 1975, and Stanford quarterback John Elway, second to Herschel Walker in 1982. Griffin and Walker were the preseason favorites those years.

Gerhart flew well under the radar of most Heisman voters before the 2009 season. His candidacy and Luck's last year gave Young experience in Heisman marketing.

"The Heisman is very much a performance-based award," he said. "It is not won by glitzy campaigns or by purchasing billboards in Times Square."

He was referring to the giant "Joey Heisman" billboard that Oregon boosters bought in Manhattan in 2001 to promote quarterback Joey Harrington. (He finished fourth.)

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Luck has other assets than his on-field talents. His decision to stay in school and forgo millions of pro dollars solidified his stature as a student who genuinely values academics. He also will charm voters with his intelligence, humility and sense of humor in interviews. Most of his games will be on national TV. He already has been featured in a highly flattering 4,000-word article in Sports Illustrated.

He and the Cardinal would have plenty of momentum if they can get past Arizona in Week 3; they very well might be 6-0 going into the USC game Oct. 29.

### Stanford's plans

Still, it's going to take an effective media campaign to keep Luck out front as other contenders arise. Along with regular e-mails to the voters, Stanford again will post Luck's highlights on YouTube. The athletic department website, [gostanford.com](http://gostanford.com), will link to a site promoting Luck, and the school will use Facebook and other social media to trumpet his candidacy.

If Luck repeats his 2010 performance, and the Cardinal win the Pac-12 title, the trophy figures to be his. But what if Stanford loses two or three games? Somebody else on an undefeated team - possibly Oregon's LaMichael James - could steal some of his thunder.

"Nine of the last 11 Heisman winners have played in the BCS Championship Game," Young said. "Team success is just as important as individual performance."

### Big finish

Finishing with a flourish is important, too. Ingram squeaked past Gerhart on the strength of his 113-yard, three-touchdown performance against Florida in the SEC championship game. Ingram also caught a pass for a 69-yard gain.

"He had the opportunity to make the last impression," Young said. "Seventy-five percent of the votes are cast the final weekend." Jeff Purinton, an associate athletic director at Alabama who guided Ingram's Heisman campaign after doing the same for 2000 winner Chris Weinke of Florida State, said another key was winning votes from the Northeast. "His dad (also named Mark Ingram) had played for the (New York) Giants, so he was known to a lot of people there," Purinton said.

This year's voting deadline is Dec. 5, three days after the inaugural Pac-12 championship game. There are 927 eligible voters, including 870 media members. Online fan balloting counts for one vote, and each of the 56 living Heisman winners has a vote, including 1969 Heisman winner O.J. Simpson, currently incarcerated in Nevada on armed robbery and kidnapping charges.

### A Heisman history

Players from Bay Area colleges who finished in the top five in the Heisman Trophy voting:

Year	Player	School	Place
'38	RB Vic Bottari	Cal	5
'40	QB Frankie Albert	Stanford	4
'41	Albert	Stanford	3
'45	RB Herman Wedemeyer	St. Mary's	4
'48	RB Jackie Jensen	Cal	4
'51	TE/DE Bill McColl	Stanford	4
'53	QB Bob Garrett	Stanford	5
'54	QB Paul Larson	Cal	5
'58	QB Joe Kapp	Cal	5
'70	QB Jim Plunkett	Stanford	1
'75	RB Chuck Muncie	Cal	2
'82	QB John Elway	Stanford	2
'09	RB Toby Gerhart	Stanford	2
'10	QB Andrew Luck	Stanford	2