



# Andrew Luck has no doubts about picking Stanford over NFL

By **Andy Gardiner**, USA TODAY

STANFORD, Calif. -- One of the skills that has enabled [Andrew Luck](#) to become an elite college quarterback is being able to function despite duress. This focus under pressure was never more evident than in January. Luck led Stanford to a berth in the [FedEx Orange Bowl](#) against [Virginia Tech](#), unfamiliar territory for a Cardinal program making its first at-large appearance in a [Bowl Championship Series](#) game. There was also buzz surrounding Stanford coach [Jim Harbaugh](#), whose success had made him the leading candidate for a handful of [NFL](#) head coaching jobs.



By **Mike Ehrmann**, Getty Images

Andrew Luck is back at Stanford after leading the Cardinal to a 12-1 record and a win in the Orange Bowl last year.

Beyond all of that was Luck's uncertain future. After throwing for more than 3,000 yards, guiding Stanford to a 12-1 record and finishing as runner-up for the [Heisman Trophy](#), the redshirt sophomore had climbed to the top of virtually every expert's 2011 NFL draft chart.

For every question Luck fielded in Miami about Virginia Tech's defensive schemes, there were three about whether he intended to enter the draft or return for his junior season with the Cardinal.

"I don't know if I'm good at compartmentalizing things like that, but I consciously avoided thinking about anything other than the Orange Bowl," Luck said this spring. "I didn't want to let myself down, let my family down, let Stanford down by getting caught up in something I could postpone until later.

"We'd had a great season, but it would have all been for naught if we'd lost that game."

Luck threw four touchdown passes as the Cardinal routed the Hokies 40-12. Two days later, he announced he would return to school, turning Stanford into a Rose Bowl favorite, becoming the leader in the Heisman race and ascending to the top of 2012 NFL mock drafts in one neat step.

"I don't remember a specific moment when I realized what my decision was, but there was no angst involved," Luck said. "I was pretty happy with myself the whole time, and I think I was always leaning toward staying in school."

Andrew is the eldest of Oliver and Kathy Luck's four children. His father was a Rhodes scholar finalist, an NFL quarterback for five years and an NFL executive in Europe before becoming athletics director at his alma mater, [West Virginia](#), in 2010. The parents gave their son a wide berth on this decision.

"It's his life, his career, his responsibility, and no one in our immediate family was going to tell him what to do," Oliver said.

"He has always made smart decisions, and he didn't need me to tell him how important an engineering degree from Stanford was."

Where Oliver did weigh in was in regard to the current NFL lockout. His career spanned strikes in 1982 and 1986.

"My advice was really limited to a couple of things," Oliver said. "My life as a pro quarterback and life in pro football and the unknowns that come anytime you have a lockout."

The one person Andrew Luck did seek out for perspective was [Indianapolis Colts](#) quarterback [Peyton Manning](#), who decided not to enter the draft early and wound up as the No. 1 pick in 1998 after completing his college career at Tennessee.

"A couple of guys on our staff knew Peyton or played with him and told me that if I wanted to, he would love to talk with me," Luck said. "If you have an opportunity to talk with Peyton Manning, you make the call."

Manning said he learned a lot his senior season that was critical in helping him make the adjustment to the NFL. Without that final year, Manning said, there was no way he could have handled his first two pro seasons as successfully as he did.

"He told me that you can't be hesitant or worry about injuries," Luck said. "You can't look back and regret your decision, just live with it and go. The advice of probably the best quarterback in the world is worth its weight in gold."

One of the people happiest with Luck's decision was [David Shaw](#), Stanford's offensive coordinator, who was promoted to head coach after Harbaugh left for the [San Francisco 49ers](#) three days after Luck announced he was returning.

"Andrew asked me what I would have said to him had I been head coach when he was still deciding, and I said I would have had only one question: Are you done playing college football?" Shaw said. "Because if you're not done with it and you can't completely pour yourself into the NFL, you can't be successful."

"I think Andrew loves college football; he loves it here at Stanford and he loves his teammates. This year was so good, and we've got some really good football players coming back who are some of his best friends."

"I think he really wanted to have one last ride with those guys."