

The Moose is loose on The Farm

By Antonio Gonzalez, Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — Jonathan Martin goes only by “Moose” on this campus. That’s the way the big, burly left tackle introduces himself and even some of his Stanford professors refer to him by that moniker.

There might not be a more appropriate nickname in the nation.

Martin protects college football’s most insured blindside — Heisman Trophy hopeful and projected No. 1 overall pick Andrew Luck — for the sixth-ranked Cardinal, and his label leaves little room for interpretation. Even his parents, part of a long family line of Harvard graduates, have stepped out of the Ivy League mentality and bought into the mystique.

“Every father wants his son to have a nickname like Moose,” said Martin’s father, Gus, a professor of criminal justice administration at Cal State Dominguez Hills. “It’s very, very cool.”

The nickname is well earned.

Martin was too big for Pop Warner growing up in the Los Angeles area. So while playing flag football in fifth grade, one of his friends and teammates started calling him Moose for being so physical in a non-contact game.

“I guess I was just mauling people,” Martin said. “I got the nickname. It stuck.”

The lore has only grown on The Farm.

Although he will likely be a high first-round pick and possibly the first offensive tackle taken in April’s draft, chances are NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell will only call out Jonathan on stage. After all, Martin hasn’t forgotten his roots.

If ever there was somebody destined to land at Harvard, it was Martin. His mother, Jane, a lawyer for Toyota, and both her parents also went to Harvard. In total, Martin would have been the ninth person in his family to attend the prestigious university.

“There was never any family pressure. Just family tradition,” Gus said.

The 6-foot-6, 304-pound tackle grew into academics far before athletics. He played chess for hours at home as a kid and his parents read classic literature to him and his older sister, Sarah, who’s now in medical school at Pittsburgh.

Martin’s verbal skills grew at an early age. Baby talk stayed at a minimum at home and topics at the dinner table stretched into adult discussions.

“He and I had many in-depth conversations for a little kid,” Gus said, chuckling. “He wasn’t nerdy. He was cool nerdy.”

Martin figured his family still wanted him to attend an Ivy League school, if not Harvard, but he always wanted to play major college football. At first, though, athletic scholarships trickled in slowly.

The first offer from a Pac-12 program came from UCLA, which Stanford hosts Saturday night. Martin verbally committed immediately to his hometown college, unsure if other letters would come.

So when he qualified for Stanford and received a football offer, going to the “Harvard of the West” gave him the best of both worlds.

“It was a no-brainer,” he said.

Even with his size and stature, Martin had obstacles to clear.

The offensive lineman would get headaches while lifting weights in high school, so he couldn’t build strength, especially while doubling as the center on the basketball team at North Hollywood’s Harvard-Westlake. Coaches finally figured out Martin wasn’t breathing when he lifted. Once they solved the problem, he grew into one of the top tackles in his class.

Learning how to have a mean streak still took time.

Martin is a gentle giant in every sense, soft-spoken and articulate, more likely to reason with somebody than start a brawl. His coach at Harvard-Westlake, Vic Eumont, said Martin became the best offensive lineman by his sophomore season when the left tackle started to show his aggressive side.

“Jonathan figured it out and he told me, ‘A lot those guys loaf. When they loaf, I kill them,’” Eumont said. “It was something he really had to learn to enjoy. You can see him flip the switch when he’s on the field.”

Perhaps there’s no program that craves a left tackle more than Stanford this season.

With Luck turning down the NFL to stay another year, making sure nothing happens to the quarterback is a responsibility Martin takes seriously. The Cardinal (3-0) have allowed only two sacks so far on Luck, and one of those came when he ran out of bounds while getting chased. Neither came from Martin's side.

"He has natural tools," Stanford coach David Shaw said. "An old coach once told me you have to find the guy that can do the things that you can't teach. And you can't teach a guy to be 6-6, 304 pounds and be athletic."

Martin also took the time this summer to help a revamped line transition.

Along with fellow senior and guard David DeCastro, Martin might be the biggest reason there has been almost no slippage — if anything, there has been improvement — on an offensive line that lost three starters from last season, including All-America center Chase Beeler. While linemen prefer to go unnoticed, Luck credits Martin's protection for much of his success.

Or, as he knows him, the Moose.

"He's very meticulous," Luck said, pausing for effect, "which I appreciate."