

As (Andrew) Luck would have it, Stanford QB tunes out the noise

By Sam Farmer, LA Times

Andrew Luck hears it. How could he not? The Stanford campus is low-key and idyllic, but it's not so insulated from the real world that the clamoring for Luck goes unnoticed. He is, after all, the most anticipated NFL prospect in years, maybe since John Elway called this university home 30 years ago.

"I don't live in a hole, I don't live in a cave," the quarterback said Tuesday, before plunging into preparations for Saturday's game at USC. "The talk is fine. You hear that stuff. But it's not that hard not to get caught up in it, really. It would be a disservice to my teammates and this university if I started thinking about all that stuff."

He calls the so-called "Suck for Luck" campaigns "stupid," shaking his head at the notion some fans of losing teams — most notably the 0-7 Indianapolis Colts and 0-6 Miami Dolphins — are rooting for those losses to keep mounting so their franchise will be in position to use the No. 1 pick on him in the spring.

"I don't think a fan should want a team to lose, whether now or later," he said. "Fans should support their team, have them win, and whatever happens, happens."

Just about everyone is comfortable talking about Luck's collision course with the NFL but Luck himself. He seems almost embarrassed about the hubbub created by what he has done on the field, that he needs a security detail after games to keep professional autograph seekers at bay, and that on Sunday NBC showed a clip of his highlights when New Orleans' 62-7 rout of the Colts got out of hand.

There's no mystery to the fervor surrounding Luck, whose team is riding a school-record 15-game winning streak, the longest in college football. Lumberjack-thick at 6 feet 4, 237 pounds, Luck is astoundingly poised, has the freedom (and know-how) to call his own plays at the line of scrimmage, and rarely is off target. In the last four games, he has completed 75.2% of his passes (88 of 117) for 1,102 yards and 12 touchdowns.

"Every week I have to answer Andrew Luck questions, and I'm running out of things to say," said Stanford Coach David Shaw, a former NFL assistant coach with Philadelphia, Oakland and Baltimore. "I don't want to build him up too much, but the problem is there are not a lot of flaws. There are not a lot of things that you'd want to change, that he needs to get better at. And that's the difference between him and every other quarterback I've been around."

"You get tired of saying, 'Nice throw.' You get tired of saying, 'Good read.' You get tired of saying, 'Nice job in the pocket.' And he gets tired of hearing it. So you get to the point where I try not to compliment him much. You just move on. His mentality is, 'OK, what's the next play? What do I need to be ready for?' It's, 'Don't pat me on the back. Tell me what the next thing is coming down the pike.'"

Even though Shaw is stingy with the compliments, that doesn't mean he isn't thinking them.

"He's like a vitamin — once a day he does something that just makes you say, 'Wow!' " Shaw said. "And it's been once a day for four years. Every single day he makes a throw that you just go, 'Wow . . .' and we move on to the next play. You look at film that night and he's moving to his left, throwing 30 yards across his body. It's just stuff that other human beings can't do. He just does it and comes back to the huddle and says, 'What's the next play?'"

When it comes to the draft, NFL teams can't mull their next big play until they know when they're selecting. At league meetings in Houston this month, Colts owner Jim Irsay — his team then 0-5 — said Indianapolis would have a tough time passing on Luck, regardless of Peyton Manning's status. The future of the four-time NFL most valuable player is uncertain as Manning recovers from neck surgery.

"Guys like that come along so rarely," Irsay said of Luck. "Even if it means that guy sits for three or four years, you'd certainly think about taking him."

John Lynch, a former Stanford star and All-Pro safety, called Luck "one of those guys that comes around every 15 or 20 years" and said television doesn't do him justice.

"On TV, it doesn't look like he has the strongest arm. It's almost a Philip Rivers thing; he kind of pushes the ball," Lynch said, referring to the San Diego quarterback. "But Andrew's got all the arm strength in the world. Against Arizona, I saw him run around the corner and right past a cornerback who was supposed to run a 4.3 [40-yard dash]. I think he's going to be an exceptional pro."

In many NFL scouting circles, the consensus is that Luck is "as advertised," a player with all the physical abilities, and the mental makeup

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to succeed. Scouting is not an exact science — and experts routinely miss on quarterbacks — yet many evaluators believe Luck is about as close as you can get to a sure thing.

From Luck's perspective, the only sure thing about the NFL these days is he doesn't want to discuss it.

"I stay busy," said Luck, who's majoring in architectural design. "Football takes up a good portion of the day. Going to class. I'm not sitting around watching TV or browsing the Internet too much. Then being around my teammates, good guys, they make sure I don't get too full of myself or my head in the wrong place.

"What's the point of talking about it if it's months away? I've got more important things than to worry about that stuff."

More important things like the next game, the next practice, the next play.