

Stanford's Luck has yet to run out

By Mike Waldner, Daily Breeze Columnist

You have to love Andrew Luck's unassuming uncomplicated response when told people were surprised he passed on the opportunity to move to the NFL and instead would remain Stanford's quarterback.

"I still get to play football," he said.

He could be testing himself at the same level with stars such as Tom Brady, Drew Brees and Philip Rivers. He could be testing himself against fellow rookies Cam Newton, Andy Dalton and Christian Ponder.

Not necessary. Not yet. No rush.

Luck is at peace with his decision to remain an undergraduate. He would be happy in an intramural league as long as he got to run around throwing the football. OK, that's a stretch. But he is happy he'll be running around throwing the football in the Coliseum Saturday evening against USC.

Young athletes become jaded. They become robotic when they answer questions, perhaps because they have watched too many interviews on television and memorized too many bland answers. Their eyes glass over and they go on cruise control.

This does not happen with Luck. At least it did not happen during this particular conversation prior to the season. He was engaged. His answers were thoughtful.

Back to the surprise when he opted to return to Stanford.

"I don't understand that thought," he said.

As the projected No. 1 pick in the draft he passed on a contract for at least four years and \$22 million. That's what Newton, the eventual No. 1 pick, received.
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"I mean, I understand," he said.

It's just that his priorities are such that he is exactly where he wants to be at this point of his life. It's a bonus that he's the leading candidate to win the Heisman Trophy.

Academically, he is a senior architectural design major. So although this is only his third year on the football field with Stanford, he is in his fourth year on campus.

"In the back of my mind all of the time was that I wanted to do four years of college," he said.

How much did remaining in school have to do with the experience as a student at Stanford? How much did the decision have to do with the opportunity to finish out four years with the guys he came in with as a freshman?

"I don't know if I can put a percentage on each one, but they both are important," he acknowledged. "I'm enjoying college. There's that aspect. But coming back with the guys in my recruiting class and trying to leave a very positive mark on Stanford was a big deal to me."

And?

"I love being able to represent Stanford University," he said.

This quite obviously is a mature young man.

The Cardinal love having him represent them. Their bonus is he is a quarterback who brings a rare mixture of accuracy, velocity, finesse, leadership and understanding of the total game.

Back in the day, this would have been the plot for a movie starring Burt Lancaster or Ronald Reagan as the humble star with Pat O'Brien or John Wayne playing the intense coach.

Yet another aspect of remaining at Stanford has to do with how Luck was brought up.

"Sure, my parents played a big part," he said of Kathy and Oliver, the former West Virginia University and NFL quarterback who is now athletic director at WVU. "I'm sure a lot of my decisions are based on how they raised me and the values they put on certain things as a family."

Did Luck have deep, lengthy meetings with his family about his decision or did he make it himself?

"I did it pretty much myself," he said.

Sort of.

"I mean, I must have told them," he said. "They are my parents. I asked them for their advice. But I sort of made it myself."

He probably figured he knew what they thought without talking to them.

"I did," he said.

He paused a moment.

"I think," he said, laughing.

One of the hurdles Luck faces this season, along with defenses primed to deal with him, is the need for reporters to continually revisit his decision to remain at Stanford.

"I understand that's part of it," he said. "All actions have consequences and this is one of them. I'll try not to get mentally hijacked over it."

He has the same attitude about all the questions the quarterback gets while the center or nose tackle are ignored.

"I used to get a little flustered by it every now and again," he admitted. "But I've come to understand it. There's no use getting mentally hijacked."

Generally, the people who are hijacked mentally, as well as physically, are playing against Luck and undefeated Stanford.