

Heisman or not, Luck's legacy at Stanford sealed

Antonio Gonzalez, AP

STANFORD, Calif. — Andrew Luck has been a little worried lately.

About the outcome of the Heisman Trophy race or what NFL franchise might select him with the No. 1 overall pick perhaps? No, Luck has other priorities at the moment.

Stanford's standout quarterback walked into his academic adviser's office last week concerned about an architecture studio session. He'll need to complete the work to earn his degree in the spring, and Luck seemed nervous that his busy schedule might interfere.

"He asked, 'Could you let the instructor know I'm going to have to miss a weekend for an OTA or minicamp?'" said John Barton, director of the Architectural Design Program at Stanford. "It's 20 weeks out, and he's already thinking ahead. He's already thinking about how his obligations to sports are going to affect his obligations for class. And it's a weekend for crying out loud. He's probably not even going to have to miss a class."

Typical Luck.

The most sought-after NFL prospect in more than a decade is traveling to New York again this week, joining Alabama's Trent Richardson, Baylor's Robert Griffin III, Wisconsin's Montee Ball and LSU's Tyrann Mathieu as Heisman Trophy finalists. While Luck wants to bring the award back to his beloved university after being the runner-up to Auburn's Cam Newton last year, he isn't losing any sleep about the results.

Heisman or not, Luck's legacy at Stanford is sealed.

Those around the Silicon Valley campus who know Luck best believe his Heisman status shouldn't be in question, either. After four seasons at the prestigious university, they'll remember Luck as the person and player who lifted the football program to new heights, a quarterback who called his own plays, a spectacular student, friend, teammate, roommate, brother and ambassador.

Mike Gleeson has watched every Stanford practice and game for 19 years, breaking down each to the core. As the program's video coordinator, Gleeson has shot and sliced countless hours of football.

He has never seen anybody like Luck.

"Andrew has a way of almost every single practice making me chuckle, sometimes out loud, of the ridiculousness," Gleeson said. "He will do stuff that you just shouldn't be able to do, and he does it. And it just makes me laugh because we're so spoiled. When the ball hits the ground, 98 percent of the time the receiver drops it. It wasn't a bad throw. He's not perfect, but you get used to seeing things in a pattern."

Even with all the incredible plays Gleeson has witnessed, the moment he remembers most about Luck has little to do with football. During his redshirt freshman season in 2009, Luck asked that the weekly team highlight film shown Friday nights before games be changed.

"Andrew just said, 'Hey, I don't like to be featured so much in the videos. Put the older guys, the seniors, they deserve it more,'" Gleeson said. "He's just very, very humble. He doesn't like the attention. He doesn't enjoy it. But he does it and he embraces it because he loves this university and he's proud of us. He'd prefer to work hard, do his job and be like everybody else."

Luck never has craved the spotlight.

With the awards circuit hitting the stretch run, Stanford coach David Shaw called Luck into his office, asking the quarterback to finally stop downplaying his role. And Shaw practically apologized to Luck for the program putting on a media blitz for his Heisman campaign.

"I told him, 'Andrew, over the next week, we're going to talk about you a lot, and you're going to hate every minute. Don't pay attention,'" Shaw said. "But this is necessary. And the best thing is, none of it is fabricated."

Shaw has too many memories from Luck to pinpoint just one.

Among the favorites from games this season: Getting bear hugged and picked up by Luck after a triple-overtime victory at Southern California. Luck's one-hand, tiptoe catch against UCLA on a trick play. And when the quarterback dove for the pylon — giving every Stanford fan a scare — to score in the season opener against San Jose State.

"He's like a vitamin. Once a day he does something that makes you say, 'Wow,'" Shaw said. "And it's been once a day for four years."

Sometimes even more than once.

Jim Viglizzo's chefs cook the food that feeds Luck most. Luck visits his restaurant, Jimmy V's Sports Café, inside the Stanford athletic

building about five times a week — often for more than once a day.

Luck's favorite food is a ham and egg breakfast sandwich — usually on toasted ciabatta bread — after a morning workout. If it's lunch time, make it a turkey club.

"Even when the line stretches around the corner, he always waits in line, is super polite, knows everybody's name," Viglizzo said.

Griff Whalen, meanwhile, has had an inside look at Luck's life.

The Stanford wide receiver has been Luck's roommate the past three years. The two are, in many ways, opposites.

Luck goes to bed early, Whalen is a night owl. Whalen is always working on projects, making messes in the dormitory, and Luck never wants to clean up after the receiver. And anytime a highlight of Luck comes on the television, there is an awkward pause.

"We just kind of click over or keep doing what we're doing," Whalen said.

The friendship they've formed goes well beyond football.

Whalen, a former walk-on, will never forget when he found out he earned a football scholarship before last season. While he was relatively somber about the achievement, Luck's emotions caught him by surprise.

"Andrew was happier than me," Whalen said. "You'd think he was the guy who just earned a scholarship."

Some of Luck's family on campus is actually his real blood.

His sister, Mary Ellen, is a sophomore on the Stanford volleyball team. The siblings try to make time to meet for dinner at least once a week. If not, there's almost always another reason to run into each other.

"Usually it's just to borrow his car," Mary Ellen joked.

Not that Luck drives much in the Honda Accord he brought out from Texas with his dad before his sophomore year. He usually pedals a bike around the tree-lined campus, parking it on a rusty rack outside the football offices.

Luck's father, Oliver, is the West Virginia athletic director and a former NFL quarterback who he sips red wine before most Stanford home games like so many other fans. The younger Luck spent the first 11 years of his childhood growing up in parts of Germany and London while Oliver was an executive in the World League of American Football and NFL Europe.

There, Luck developed an appreciation for architecture, and his fleet footwork first formed from soccer — not football. The only stateside action he ever watched was an old tape of dad playing for the Houston Oilers.

"We both played the same position. We both share a last name," Oliver said, "but I think he's a much better player than I ever was."

During a homemade dinner Jim Plunkett hosted at his house last year for Stanford quarterbacks, Luck never wandered over to the tantalizing trophy room where the only Heisman a Cardinal player has ever won rests. Rather, he tended to Chef Plunkett's plate of beef tenderloin, potatoes and other vegetables.

"We don't necessarily talk about the Heisman," Plunkett said.

Plunkett has traveled to New York's Downtown Athletic Club for the Heisman ceremony most years since he brought back the award to the Bay Area in 1970. John Elway (1982), Toby Gerhart (2009) and Luck (2010) all have finished second since.

About the only thing keeping Luck from being the clear-cut favorite to break that trend — which he had been since announcing his return in January — is his two interceptions and one fumble during Stanford's 53-30 loss to No. 6 Oregon, the only team to beat the Cardinal in a two-year run of near-perfection.

"He's certainly the frontrunner in my eyes," Plunkett said. "You can't evaluate a kid in one game. But if anybody has seen him play multiple times or studied film on him, you'll just see what a tremendous presence he is out there on the football field."

Back in August, former Stanford coach Jim Harbaugh revealed to The Associated Press that Luck's talent blossomed so soon that he wanted to start him a couple games into the 2008 season. Instead, Luck had other plans.

"He told me he didn't think he had earned it," said Harbaugh, now the San Francisco 49ers coach. "He didn't think he had beaten anybody out. And as excited that he would be to start, he didn't feel like he had won the job by beating anybody out."

Luck has set the pace despite that redshirt season.

The Pac-12 Offensive Player of the Year has lifted No. 4 Stanford (11-1, 8-1) to consecutive 11-win seasons for the first time and owns

almost every major school passing record — and doing it in only three years. After trouncing Virginia Tech 40-12 in the Orange Bowl last season, the Cardinal will face No. 3 Oklahoma State in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 2 in Luck's final collegiate game.

Then he'll head to the worst NFL franchise, a place where fans have undoubtedly cheered for losses in hopes of drafting him.

Whether he'll hear his name announced as the Heisman Trophy winner at Saturday night's ceremony is uncertain. For Luck, how outsiders view him is almost irrelevant.

"I don't care about what kind of impression I make on anybody," Luck said about Heisman voters, "besides the guys in this locker room."

By summer, he'll have the one title that means most to him: Stanford graduate.