

# How did Stanford's Andrew Luck become the poster boy for college football?

BY JENNI CARLSON, Oklahoman

PARADISE VALLEY, Ariz. — Andrew Luck used to play catch in the front yard with his dad when he was growing up.

Just like every boy in America, right?

Except that his dad had been an NFL quarterback.

Oh, and their front yard was in suburban Frankfurt. Their German neighbors didn't quite know what to make of those two and that weirdly shaped ball.

More than a decade later, Luck has become the poster boy for college football.

He led one-time-doormat Stanford to back-to-back BCS bowls, the Orange a year ago and the Fiesta against Oklahoma State on Monday night. He spurned the pros and their millions for another season in college. He is about to be the top pick in the NFL Draft, but he'd just as soon talk about his love of architecture or his desire to one day design a sports stadium.

This isn't your average college quarterback.

Chalk it up to growing up Luck.

"My wife asks his mother all the time, 'How did you do this? How did you make this kid? How did you provide an environment that spawned Andrew Luck?'" Stanford coach David Shaw said.

"It is kind of a perfect storm of ingredients that produce our No. 12."

Luck is the oldest of four children, but when he was a toddler and still an only child, his parents moved to Europe. After his father, Oliver, spent four seasons with the Houston Oilers, he became vice president of business development for the NFL. That soon spawned a new opportunity in a new place: general manager of the Frankfurt Galaxy.

(Did we mention Oliver Luck is a lawyer who was once a Rhodes Scholar finalist?)

While he went on to become GM of the Rhein Fire, then president and CEO of NFL Europe, his young family was seeing a whole different part of the world.

Andrew's first sport, for example, wasn't football but futbol. Soccer taught him teamwork, footwork and field vision, some of the characteristics that he's most known for now.

Then there was the excitement and enthusiasm for the sport. One of his earliest memories is going to an Arsenal game to watch the renowned English Premier League team.

"Probably heard 50 words I had never heard before," he said.

He smiled.

"That was probably my first introduction to how passionate fans are toward their teams, whether it is in soccer, football, rugby, baseball, whatever."

The family spent nine years in Europe before moving back to the United States and settling in the Houston area. Living abroad had an impact on Luck that is obvious to those who know him best.

"You can tell that he's been very well-cultured growing up," said Stanford linebacker Chase Thomas, one of Luck's closest friends.

Offensive lineman Jonathan Martin said, "He's not your typical Texas guy."

Luck's not without some down-home qualities, though. Humility. Charisma. Modesty.

He's also extremely close to his family. Luck's younger sister Mary Ellen, for example, followed him to Stanford a few years ago. She is a sophomore on the volleyball team, and they regularly go to dinner.

Next year, younger sister Emily, also a volleyball player, will be at Stanford.

Would anyone be surprised if younger brother, Addison, one day makes his way to Palo Alto?

Perhaps those years spent overseas bonded the family. Maybe Oliver and Kathy Luck, both lawyers, created an environment that would've done that regardless of where they lived.

Whatever the case, Andrew Luck looks to his family for support and for guidance.

"My mom avoids the limelight in a lot of ways," he said. "She brings a very level head to all situations. She's very low key.

"My dad ... he is there for me if I have a question. If he feels like an opinion is needed — and I'm not asking — he will give it to me. But I think he trusts me and all my siblings to make the right decisions."

Oliver, now the athletic director at West Virginia, coached his oldest son in Pop Warner football but never beyond sixth grade. Once Andrew was playing for school teams, his dad left the coaching to others.

"Even in middle school, he wouldn't meddle in the middle school coach's affairs, which I appreciate," Luck said. "It makes it a lot easier to come home after practice and games.

"He has always been there more as a father than as a coach."

Sure, his dad has Roger Goodell and Warren Moon and just about any NFL wheeler-dealer imaginable on speed dial. That has come in handy from time to time.

But for the most part, Luck's mom and dad have trusted that their parenting has been solid and that their son can now stand on his own two feet.

From the look of things, they're right.

"He grew up with humility and knew that he had a lot of talent but knew that's not what was going to make him be successful," Shaw said. "He is a hard worker. He is a tough kid. He is the ultimate competitor."

As for that advice that Luck's mom gives Shaw's wife?

"She just always says a lot of love and a lot of leeway."