

Whalen is a new breed of Stanford guy

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By Ted Miller

Ryan Whalen is one of those Stanford guys. You know the type. Sure, he plays football, but he also has a 3.78 GPA while majoring in science, technology and society and does things like intern at Golden Gate Capital in San Francisco -- "a leading private equity firm with \$9 billion in capital under management."

But what being a Stanford guy means has changed over the past couple of seasons. Under coach Jim Harbaugh, the Cardinal have become a gritty, physical contender, one that spanked USC and beat eventual Pac-10 champion Oregon last fall.

So while Whalen is clean-cut and smart and probably will one day be a Master of the Universe with a postcard view of San Francisco Bay from the windows of his 800 square-foot office, he also can whip some butt.

Bruce Feldman named North Carolina linebacker Bruce Carter his No. 1 strength and conditioning "freak." And Carter is a freak, no doubt. The 238 pounder told Feldman he was most proud of his 374 pound power clean, which is tied for tops on the Tar Heels.

Whalen can only power clean 350 pounds. Of course, he weighs 205 pounds. And plays receiver.

"It's one of my best exercises," Whalen explained.

Whalen also runs a 4.5 40-yard dash, bench presses 340 pounds and squats 455.

Not bad for a former walk-on.

Whalen does have one big advantage in the weight room. He started training hard in high school, and it just so happens at Monte Vista High School in Danville, Calif., that means you get to cross paths with a coach named Alex Krychev, who in 1972 was known as Aleksandr Kraichev, Bulgarian Olympic silver medalist in weight lifting.

Still, despite catching 80 passes for over 1,200 yards and scoring 14 touchdowns as a senior and earning All-State honors in football and basketball, Whalen didn't get any Pac-10 scholarship offers. He opted to walk on at Stanford and made such an immediate positive impression he was put on scholarship before his freshman season started.

Just FYI: That scholarship saved his parents about \$50,000 a year in tuition and room and board. Merry Christmas, mom and dad.

Whalen played in all 12 games his freshman year, started seven as a sophomore and then led the Cardinal with 57 receptions for 926 yards last year. He's become one of the best receivers in the Pac-10 as Stanford also has risen in the pecking order.

"When I came in, people weren't really sure what to expect," he said. "Now, as the years have gone on, when we talk about things in the offseason -- winning the Pac-10 championship and the national championship -- those are goals that we feel are realistic. You can feel it within the team."

Whalen could put up big numbers this year. For one, the Cardinal, after losing running back Toby Gerhart, the Heisman Trophy runnerup, figures to be more of a passing team. And the guy throwing those balls, sophomore quarterback Andrew Luck, could be the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL draft whenever he opts to make himself available.

"He's got great touch and every day in practice he makes a couple of throws where it's like, 'Wow. Not many people can make that throw.' You start to appreciate it as you work out with him more and more," Whalen said.

Luck and Whalen -- among others -- are new sorts of Stanford guys. Sure, they are smart and gifted and are willing to work hard to accomplish their goals. But, first and foremost, they want to beat your brains out on the football field.

"Talent and natural ability are not enough," Whalen said. "What sets players apart is how hard they work and how hard they train themselves to maximize their ability."