



# Stanford's running game to count on newest version of TG

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Sophomore tailback Tyler Gaffney, who also plays baseball at Stanford, will likely lead a run-by-committee approach that will be stepping in for departed Toby Gerhart.

STANFORD, Calif. — Tyler Gaffney started hearing the comparisons as far back as his junior year in high school, right around the time the standout running back and outfielder was considering attending Stanford.

The Cardinal happened to feature a tailback with his same initials and similar dimensions who also played baseball in the spring, so naturally Stanford followers envisioned Gaffney as the successor to [Toby Gerhart](#).

"He's the next TG," they said and blogged.

To which Gaffney, a sophomore-to-be majoring in

communications and public speaking, responds:

"He was the best running back in the nation. Being compared to someone like that is great, but I plan on doing my own thing. I don't want to follow in someone's footsteps but rather let those footsteps guide me."

His view on the issue of who will replace Gerhart — who set school records for yards and touchdowns and finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting last season — is practical and realistic.

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Not only does Gaffney's commitment to baseball sometimes interfere with his football duties — he missed 10 of the team's 15 spring practices — but he's facing lots of competition for the lead back spot.

Senior Jeremy Stewart, who was sidelined by injury and illness for 10 games the last two seasons, is the most experienced of the top candidates with 526 career yards. He's also the best blocker and the best receiver out of the backfield, according to coach [Jim Harbaugh](#).

Stepfan Taylor had a bigger impact than Gaffney had last season, when both played as true freshmen, rushing 56 times for 303 yards and two touchdowns. Gaffney played in 12 of the 13 games but carried only 22 times for 87 yards and no scores.

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"It could be one of those guys, two of those guys, three of those guys trying to fill the shoes and replace the production (of Gerhart)," Harbaugh says. "And I don't know if one guy can do it at this point."

None of them is the Cardinal's leading returning rusher. That distinction belongs to quarterback Andrew Luck, who ran for 354 yards and averaged 5.8 per attempt.

Luck also led the Pacific-10 Conference in passing efficiency as a freshman and has a solid crew of returning receivers, so he might carry a bigger share of the offensive load than in 2009, when the Cardinal (8-5) posted their first winning season in eight years.

Stanford's West Coast offense usually strives for an even balance of running and throwing. But with Gerhart bulling through for a school-record 1,871 of Stanford's 2,837 rushing yards last season — not to mention scoring an NCAA-high 28 touchdowns — the Cardinal ran 63% of the time and threw 37%.

"It's fair to say we'll probably throw the ball more than we did last year," Harbaugh says.

At 6-0 and 235 pounds, Gerhart could run over opponents but also had enough speed to get around them. Gaffney, 6-0 and 216 pounds, hits the hole quickly but can also deliver punishment.

"We're not going to be [Reggie Bush](#)," Gaffney says of the elusive former Southern California star. "If you're going to tackle us, I'm trying to give more than I'm getting in the hit. Me and (Gerhart) talked about that a lot, how we're similar. But he's a little bigger than me, and he's probably going to run more downhill. I'm trying to bring more shiftiness to the field, rather than just running guys over."

Gerhart, a second-round draft pick of the [Minnesota Vikings](#), served as host when Gaffney made his recruiting visit to Stanford. The two talked about the challenges inherent in playing two sports. Like Gaffney now, Gerhart played the outfield for the Cardinal.

Coach [Mark Marquess](#), himself a baseball and football athlete during his playing days at Stanford, has seen raw edges in both from the lack of focus on one sport, but he also appreciates their rare combination of speed and power, as well as the

football mentality they have brought to the diamond.

"There's a toughness, an ability to play hurt. There's a lot of things that transfer," Marquess says. "Great athletes want to compete. You can go back to [John Elway](#), you can go to Toby, or whoever you want to talk about; they want to compete."

That's what Gaffney will be doing this fall, hoping to fill the huge void Gerhart left behind.

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