

Griff Whalen has some Luck on his side

By Jon Wilner
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It doesn't take long to understand why Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck and receiver Griff Whalen have lived together for three years.

It takes a few sentences:

What is Whalen like as a roommate?

"He'd say I stay up too late and don't clean up enough," Whalen said.

And Luck? "I go to bed too early and don't clean up enough."

They were also on the same page Saturday in the Cardinal's 48-7 victory over Colorado, when Whalen caught four of Luck's passes for 92 yards and a touchdown -- the most productive game by a Stanford receiver in weeks.

While Luck is reluctant to attribute their on-field connection to their off-the-field harmony -- he thinks it sounds "cheesy" -- the bond is apparent to everyone.

"It's not anything new," Stanford coach David Shaw said Tuesday. "They've always had a great relationship. Andrew trusts and believes in him."

Luck and Whalen keep the football talk to a minimum when they are outside the team environment. But because their lives so often intersect, they have a keen sense for each other's schedule and are able to plan voluntary workouts together in the offseason.

And unlike receiver Chris Owusu, Whalen has been healthy throughout his career, allowing him to maximize valuable pass-and-catch time with Luck.

"They have worked out together nonstop for four years," Shaw said.

Hundreds of hours later, Luck and Whalen have an innate sense for what each other is thinking on

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the field. Luck knows precisely when Whalen will make his break; Whalen knows just where Luck will place the ball.

"It's not like Andrew favors Griff," fullback Ryan Hewitt said. "But you can tell they know what each other is going to do."

If anything, the receivers have been an underutilized piece of the passing game this season, accounting for just three of Stanford's 15 touchdown catches.

That's a function of Stanford's run-pass balance and its gifted tight ends: With their size and speed, Coby Fleener, Zach Ertz and Levine Toilolo are a matchup nightmare for any defense. It's not unusual for Stanford to use all three tight ends and Hewitt together, with the receivers watching from the sideline.

"The receivers understand their role," Luck said. "Maybe they don't get as many (opportunities) as they would in another offense."

But Stanford's offense is, to a large extent, a meritocracy. The diminished role of the receivers reflects the fact that they haven't played as well as the tight ends, who average 18.8 yards per catch and have nine touchdowns.

Owusu, Stanford's fastest player, has just 11 catches in the past three games. (His failure to secure a short pass against Colorado resulted in Luck's second interception of the season.) Whalen was quiet until last week. Nobody else has more than three receptions.

"As much as anything, it's the tight ends," Shaw said. "But before it's all said and done, we're going to need Chris to make some plays. ... As a unit, the coaches have done a good job not letting (the receivers) get frustrated."

When Whalen wants the ball, he knows where to turn.

"Everybody wants to touch the ball every play," Luck said with a grin. "Living with Griff, I get to listen to him talk all week."

Stanford's Andrew Luck needs to be loud at WSU