

Stanford's Taylor handles the extra work load

By Rick Eymmer
Palo Alto Online Sports

Stanford sophomore running back Stepfan Taylor remembers how Toby Gerhart looked and felt like the day after carrying the ball 25 times or more last year.

"He'd be cut up on his arms and just be sitting there," Taylor recalled Tuesday. "I'd ask him, 'Are you sore?' He'd look up and just say, 'yeah.' "

Taylor carried the ball a career-high 28 times for a career-best 108 yards last Saturday in No. 9 Stanford's 37-14 victory over host Notre Dame. His body held up pretty well considering that was his most extensive playing time yet.

"My upper body is a little sore but my lower body is OK," said Taylor, who figures to start this Saturday's 5 p.m. against host fourth-ranked Oregon.

Taylor started the past three games, though three other running backs and two quarterbacks also share the rushing load. He assumed the team lead with 265 rushing yards. Quarterback Andrew Luck ranks second with 163 yards.

Sophomore Tyler Gaffney, who missed all but a few plays in the first quarter with an undisclosed injury, may have moved into the top spot on the depth chart had it not been for his setback.

Stanford coach Jim Harbaugh said there was a chance both Gaffney and running back Jeremy Stewart, who has not played since the season-opener, could make appearances against the Ducks.

Harbaugh would be comfortable giving Taylor the bulk of the carries if it came to that.

"He gets yards after contact," the Cardinal coach said. "He really hustles. There were a few plays he would block two guys."

Luck was a little more effusive in his praise of Taylor.

"He's a great back," the redshirt sophomore quarterback said. "He does a lot of little things that you don't realize until you watch the game film. He doesn't say much but he works hard and he's dependable."

Taylor said he worked on his blocking technique this year so he could "keep (Luck) healthy."

Instead of taking on a blitzing linebacker full force, Taylor uses the cut block.

Basketball Jim

Indiana basketball coach Tom Crean, Harbaugh's brother-in-law, was on the Stanford sidelines in Saturday's game against the Irish and spoke to the Cardinal before the game.

"His talk was Knute Rockne," Harbaugh said. "He delivered." Harbaugh, who also played basketball at Palo Alto High under the legendary Clem Wiser, said he has spoken to Crean's teams at Indiana and, previously, at Marquette. "Stanford got the better part of that deal," he said.

Harbaugh was asked about the 1981-82 Vikings' hoops team, in which he claims to have averaged 20 points a game, which lost to Riordan in the semifinals of the Central Coast Section playoffs, the final year it was all one division, at Maples Pavilion. "I was a great basketball player," Harbaugh said smiling. "That was before the 3-point line and I was an outside shooter. I also liked to post up under the basket for offensive rebounds."

Riordan lost to Jefferson High of Daly City in the CCS championship game that year. Stanford grads John Paye (a two-sport star with the Cardinal) and Eric Reveno (now the head basketball coach at Portland) led Menlo School to the state Division II title the next year at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, beating Jefferson along the way.

Off the bench

There were no official reports on the status of injured running backs Stewart and Gaffney. There was also no word on safety Michael Thomas, who had his left foot in a boot and was on crutches following Saturday's game . . . Stanford sophomore linebacker Shayne Skov on Owen Marecic's improvement at linebacker: "He's come a long way and that's because he's dedicated and immerses himself every week. Him and Andrew spend the most time watching film." . . . Offensive lineman James McGillicuddy wore number '41' for the Notre Dame game and was used as an extra blocker on several power formations. He lined up in the backfield on short-yardage situations. "He was in my ear telling me to throw him the ball," Luck said. "He's convinced he was open. He went up to Wales (Ryan Whalen) and said the defensive back hit him in the middle of running his route. 'Isn't that pass interference?' Ryan told him, 'Nope, that's being re-routed.'" . . . Skov said he's had some memorable collisions with McGillicuddy in practice. "The guy is a monster," Skov said. "Sometimes I try to avoid him." . . . Saturday's game will be televised on ABC at 5 p.m.