

# They Turn On the Power

By PETE THAMEL, NY Times

PALO ALTO, Calif. — The play that best encapsulates the revival of Stanford's football team, which has gone from 1-11 in 2006 to a national title contender in 2011, is called 97 Power. Right guard David DeCastro pulls hard to his left to bulldoze a linebacker, and left tackle Jonathan Martin, known as Moose, blocks a defensive end to clear the way for a simple inside running play.

Quarterback Andrew Luck, the front-runner to win the Heisman Trophy, does nothing more than hand off the ball, allowing the play to showcase the power and toughness of DeCastro and Martin, two other Stanford stars who project as high picks in the next N.F.L. draft.

"You know it's coming," Shannon Turley, Stanford's strength coach, said. "If you don't like it, do something about it. That's the mind-set we've tried to instill in our players."

Perhaps the most fascinating part of Stanford's transformation is the manner in which the program has ascended from the Pac-10 outhouse to the Pac-12 penthouse. Unlike with so many revivals of the past 10 years — Utah, Oregon and Texas Tech come to mind — Stanford has not spread the field to even the playing field.

Instead, it has jammed the line of scrimmage with tight ends in a pro-style offense and run a metaphorical fullback dive behind DeCastro and Martin into the national elite. Coach David Shaw fancies Stanford a power running team that happens to have the country's best quarterback.

While Luck receives a majority of the credit and adulation for Stanford's 6-0 start and No. 7 ranking, he is one of nine potential draft picks among the fourth- and fifth-year players on the team's roster, according to N.F.L. evaluators. That does not include a handful of third-year juniors and redshirt sophomores who have also emerged as prospects.

Martin and DeCastro are not far behind Luck, the presumptive No. 1 pick in the 2012 draft. Martin is considered the top tackle prospect in the country and is projected to be taken in the top 10, and DeCastro is expected to be selected late in the first round or in the second. Despite having three first-year starters on the offensive line, Stanford leads the country with just two sacks allowed.

"There's so much more talent here than people realize," Luck said. "Look at David and Moose. There's a reason we've had a good running game. Look at how many games they've played the last three years."

There is also a banner group of tight ends, with the 6-foot-6 redshirt sophomore Zach Ertz, the 6-6 fifth-year senior Coby Fleener and the 6-8 redshirt sophomore Levine Toilolo making up what is considered the country's best unit. They have combined for 12 touchdown catches, six by Fleener.

"We have a better tight end group than a lot of N.F.L. teams right now," Shaw said.

Martin's journey to Stanford came after he committed to U.C.L.A. and resisted strong overtures from Harvard, the alma mater of his parents, Gus Martin and Jane Howard-Martin. Gus Martin said the family was told by Harvard's admissions office that his son would have been the university's first fourth-generation African-American student.

Martin's great-grandfather on his mother's side, John Fitzgerald, graduated from Harvard in 1924 and knew W. E. B. DuBois. When Harvard Coach Tim Murphy came to the Martin house on a recruiting visit, Gus Martin said his son candidly told Murphy that he would most likely go to Stanford if he was accepted. There was little resistance from his parents.

"It took us one night of sleep, and after about 24 hours we finally figured it out," Gus Martin said of Stanford with a laugh. "Frankly, it's the full package. You cannot avoid becoming an educated young man or woman there."

There is still a chance he could end up at Harvard; after his N.F.L. career, Martin plans to attend law school. Gus Martin said his son came up with that himself.

"He wants to be a trial lawyer," said Vic Eumont, Martin's coach at Harvard-Westlake School in the Los Angeles area. "And he'll be the biggest around."

Shaw joked that the quiet DeCastro "arrived in a bad mood" and had not changed.

"David speaks when something needs to be said," Shaw said. "When he speaks, you better listen."

Luck unleashes his trademark goofy laugh when recalling that DeCastro often will not reciprocate high-fives in practice and that his on-field intensity carries over to their living quarters.

"He'll yell at us if we don't clean up," Luck said before mocking DeCastro's deep voice. "At first it's a gentle reminder, then it's like, 'Get it done.'"

DeCastro is from the Seattle area but his parents are South African and his father and grandfather were rugby stars in that country. His

mother, Jennifer DeCastro, said she is 6-1 and took partial credit for her son's height, which is 6-6. But his father, Colin DeCastro, said that David's penchant for numbers — he is majoring in management science and engineering, and acknowledges he "hates to read" — comes from Jennifer, who has three degrees, including a Ph.D. in audiology from Florida.

David DeCastro never played rugby, but he also did not play football until ninth grade. Still, Colin tried to channel a rugby-like intensity into David while coaching his youth teams. Among the keepsakes that Colin DeCastro has from his rugby career are the loss of two front teeth and a scar from a cut on his right eyebrow that required 19 stitches.

"A lot of the pieces of American football fit into the matrix of rugby," Colin DeCastro said. "Except that football is more specialized."

DeCastro and Martin arrived at Stanford as what Shaw called "cookie cutouts for N.F.L. football players." They both credit Turley for maximizing their potential by transforming them physically.

Both redshirted as freshmen and have been mainstays the past three seasons, with DeCastro starting every game and Martin starting all but two games, both when he was a redshirt freshman. They said Turley's nuanced training approach was the reason they had missed fewer than 10 practices combined during their careers and never needed surgery. "Knock on wood," Martin said with a smile.

Turley does not emphasize lifting a maximum amount of weight, instead focusing on repetitions and core strength that will help a lineman move the man in front of him. Turley often says that players only bench-press someone on the field if someone is on top of them, not a good thing for a lineman. There are no weight lifting records posted in the Stanford weight room, only the final scores of games Stanford has won.

"I don't care about how much guys bench, squat and clean," Turley said, referring to traditional lifting benchmarks in football programs. "Until they start giving us points for it on Saturdays; then maybe I'll care."

Do not mistake nontraditional for soft, however. Martin came to Stanford at 261 pounds with 19 percent body fat and is now 303 pounds with 23 percent body fat. He has improved his vertical jump to 32 inches from 30 ½, despite the weight gain.

DeCastro's transformation has been just as drastic. His weight has jumped from 295 to 315 while his body fat has decreased more than 4 percent to 17.3. His vertical jump increased a remarkable seven inches to 29 ½. DeCastro can bench 225 pounds 35 times, which would have been first among offensive linemen at the scouting combine last year.

"Iron sharpens iron," Turley said of Martin and DeCastro. "They want to push with and compete with each other."

Martin and DeCastro both have black ski caps from the Tunnel Workers Union, a name tabbed by the former Stanford lineman Chris Marinelli, whose father, Jim, worked on the Big Dig in Boston.

In tech-rich Palo Alto, the tunnels do not just involve broadband anymore. Led by two linchpin linemen, Stanford is bulling its way toward another celebrated season.