

Skaufel, TWHS grad closes career at Orange Bowl

By David Arno

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Life isn't too bad when one steps off the beach in order to do a phone interview.

And it could get even better for Taylor Skaufel depending on the outcome of tonight's Orange Bowl.

The 2007 graduate of The Woodlands High School has seen some rough times at Stanford — he was on a 4-8 team his freshman year — but now gets the opportunity to help the Cardinal get to 12-1 on the season with a victory in a BCS bowl game. Stanford's opponent in Miami is Atlantic Coast Conference champion Virginia Tech (11-2).

"This has all been a dream come true," Skaufel said. "When I first started out here it wasn't so hot four years ago. Now we've got a chance to win the Orange Bowl. No one expected this when I first got here. It's really been a total blessing. Now all I can do is my best to win — these opportunities don't come a lot, so I have to make the most out of it."

In his time at Stanford, Skaufel has played with some of the top players in the country.

One of them is current Cardinal quarterback Andrew Luck, a graduate of Houston's Stratford High School and the Heisman Trophy runner-up. Luck is the projected No. 1 pick in the NFL Draft if he chooses to forego his senior season.

"Andrew is a great guy. Not just a great quarterback, but he's a great leader and person too," Skaufel said. "All the guys in the locker room love him — he's really humble and fun to be around. If he ends up declaring for the draft, he deserves to go No. 1. I think he's the best in the country, but it'd be good if he stuck around another year too. We'll just have to see."

Skaufel has also played for one of the hottest names in coaching in Jim Harbaugh.

Harbaugh's name has been mentioned as a possible replacement for Rich Rodriguez at his alma mater Michigan, and as the new coach for the San Francisco 49ers after Mike Singletary was fired Dec. 26.

"I don't really know anything, but he's a great coach," Skaufel said. "I think he would definitely do well coaching in the NFL or at Michigan, but I think he may stay around here a little while longer. He's got a really good thing going here and we're still on the upswing, so I hope he sticks around for a while."

With an opportunity to end his playing career with a victory in the Orange Bowl, Skaufel said his time as a Cardinal has come full circle since his freshman season.

"To get a chance to win the Orange Bowl in my senior year is awesome. It's a great way to go out," he said. "I've really enjoyed my time at Stanford, and I feel I've really progressed not only as a football player but as a man as well. I've had great coaches here and I've got a lot of great friends.

"Now we just need to go out there and cap off this great season with a win."