

# Nottingham Ascends to Backup QB Job at Stanford

By Kyle Bonagura, Patch.com

With Saturday's season-opening game against San Jose State well in hand early in the fourth quarter, Stanford football coach David Shaw had seen enough from Heisman Trophy front-runner Andrew Luck.

It was a just-another-day-at-the-office performance for the quarterback, who returned to the Farm despite heavy indications he'd of been the top pick in the NFL draft. He ran for a score, threw for two more and finished with 171 yards passing as the Cardinal built a 43-3 lead.

That's when the nerves kicked in for redshirt freshman Brett Nottingham.

The Monte Vista High alum, who didn't appear on the first preseason depth chart before impressing coaches throughout fall camp, was told to warm up.

"I was nervous as heck," Nottingham admitted after Saturday's game. "But as the quarterback you have to at least fake that you're confident when you're in the huddle."

The nerves didn't show, thanks largely to a conservative approach from offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton.

"I was really happy he did that," Nottingham said.

After six inside running plays, Nottingham completed a 7-yard pass to Jamal-Rashad Patterson and two plays later Tyler Gaffney went up-the-gut for a 16-yard touchdown.

After a San Jose State fumble quickly returned the ball to the Stanford offense, Shaw and Hamilton decided to give Nottingham a chance to air it out. He capitalized on the opportunity on first down by hitting tight end Coby Fleener for a 39-yard touchdown.

"I had a couple deep options on the play and luckily the coaches put (Fleener) in the there," Nottingham said. "He makes my job a lot easier."

For those who saw Nottingham during his standout career at Monte Vista, the early success likely won't come as much of a surprise. He was one of the most polished passers the Bay Area had ever seen, throwing for 7,467 yards and 91 touchdowns as a two-year starter in coach Craig Bergman's offense.

But Nottingham's ascension to the backup role at Stanford came largely unexpected after he struggled to grasp Stanford's complex offense during his redshirt season.

"It was really tough for me and I wondered at times, being so overwhelmed, how long it'd take to get a firm grasp on a lot of the intricacies of the offense," he said. "I started to feel a lot more confident coming out of spring ball."

He came into camp behind redshirt sophomores Josh Nunes and Robbie Picazo, but his play almost immediately caught the attention of the Stanford coaches.

"He's shown a command of the offense," Shaw said early in camp. "We already knew about his physical tools — big strong kid, throws the ball really well — but there is more to the position and it has been fun to see." Perhaps no one is more familiar with Nottingham's progression than redshirt sophomore tight end Zach Ertz, who caught 51 passes and 12 touchdowns from him at Monte Vista in 2008.

"I was pleasantly surprised (in camp)," Ertz said. "I always knew he was a very good quarterback, obviously, but the redshirt year is always very tough. It was tough for me, it was tough for him. Luckily, he was able to have a very good camp and come in and play." Ertz, who caught a touchdown from Luck in the second quarter, added: "Hopefully me and (Brett) will have a few of those too."

The battle between Nottingham and Picazo, and, to a lesser extent, Nunes, for the No. 2 job will likely be a fluid situation as Shaw continues to promote an environment of competition originally instilled by 49ers coach Jim Harbaugh. Picazo also played in Saturday's 57-3 win and completed all three of his pass attempts. "(Nottingham) came in, looked very comfortable, called the plays with confidence and executed the plays," Shaw said. "(Picazo) did the same thing. It's a tough decision because we have a couple of guys who can do the job."

With Luck leading a team with national-title aspirations, Nottingham is content learning from Luck and preparing to play each week as if he were the starter. "I could talk about (Luck) forever," Nottingham said. "I'm really thankful to have the opportunity to sit behind him and get to watch how he prepares and learn from him. He's just a great guy, there aren't any questions I can ask him that he doesn't know the answer to."

The Cardinal's next game is Saturday at Duke and can be viewed on ESPNU at 12:30 p.m. If last week's results were an indication of what's to come there's a good chance more mop up duty will be on tap. Duke lost 23-21 to Richmond — a Football Championship Subdivision school — and the Cardinal will be a three-touchdown favorite. "Last week, I was hoping I'd get one snap," Nottingham said. "Now I know I'll be ready to go."