

Wilkerson a part of Stanford stampede

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Stanford is coming. Hide the linebackers and safeties.

No, this is not the first time The Farm has grown a quality football team, but 2010 and 2011 are the first times the police have given us a "Please remain calm" at the sight of the red S.

"It's fun at the end of games," said Anthony Wilkerson, the sophomore from Tustin whose run against Washington Saturday officially set a Cardinal single-game rushing record. He and his mates stopped at 446 yards.

"You can tell that the defensive players are getting tired of being blocked and double-teamed. I look up and I see our tight ends getting to the linebacker level, and there are holes everywhere. I don't think a lot of teams are playing like this."

No one, absolutely no one, is playing as well.

Stanford lines up against USC in The Coliseum on Saturday with 10 consecutive victories by 25 points or more. It has averaged 43.2 points in its past 20 games.

It has been in the red zone 38 times and has scored 38 times, with 30 touchdowns.

The kicker, Jordan Williamson, has been needed only 12 times for field goals. The punter, David Green, has been summoned 16 times.

Three-and-outs? Stanford has suffered only four. That's an average of one 3-and-out every seven periods.

So luck – or Luck – has little to do with this. Indeed, the act of lifting the Heisman Trophy might be the toughest physical challenge all year for quarterback Andrew Luck.

Really, how tough can it be when your team runs 54 percent of the time and, against the perfectly representative Huskies, pranced for 10.1 yards per carry?

"It's something that attracted me to Stanford when I was being recruited," Wilkerson said. "They had Toby Gerhart running over people and that was very comfortable for me."

It isn't terribly different from Tustin High, where Myron Miller has won for years on a playbook that can fit onto an index card. It's collision football, the way the game was played throughout the nation for many years, except, ironically, at Stanford.

Seven Stanford QBs were first-team All-Americans, four were on Super Bowl rosters and John Elway and Jim Plunkett were Super Bowl MVPs.

In 1998 Coy Wire was Stanford's leading rusher. He had 228 yards and two touchdowns. Gerhart ran for 28 touchdowns in 2009, but the Cardinal went without a 1,000-yard rusher from 1991 until 2008.

Jim Harbaugh changed that, and everything else.

If you need smart kids, why not make Stanford a haven for offensive linemen, traditionally the smartest guys on the field? It worked, and Luck helped as well, and now Stanford again is playing its own game while everyone else is playing catch.

"You can't prepare for them," said Miller. "Everyone else is zone blocking, taking whoever comes to them, and the back is hesitating and reading. At Stanford, the back gets the ball and goes straight downhill. He knows the hole will be there when he gets there. He's running to a designated spot, and those Stanford guys are double-teaming, creating angles, attacking. The back is at full speed and that's why they break long runs."

"These days, it's touch football. Defensive guys have their butts up in the air and they're rushing the passer. You can't stop Stanford that way, and once they start running, then the play-action game is there for Luck and all those tight ends turn into receivers. They've done an amazing job up there."

Wilkerson is sitting behind Stepfan Taylor and Tyler Gaffney. Taylor has 697 yards, Gaffney 254 and Wilkerson 214, not the stuff of postseason banquets, but against Washington they ran for 138, 117 and 93.

Wilkerson considered UCLA and a few other Pac-10 schools, but Stanford is difficult to dislodge from the door, on many levels.

"It's been interesting," Wilkerson said. "I'm taking an inter-urban class these days that studies what really goes into a city, and by the end of it you've got a different idea than you ever had before. I'm also taking a psychology class and have learned a lot about different ways of

looking at things. There's always something to get into."

Meanwhile, Harbaugh left after the Orange Bowl last year to resuscitate the 49ers. Without a real training camp or an off-season, they are 5-1.

David Shaw, the offensive coordinator, got the job, which was Luck's preference.

"I'm really glad we didn't try to reinvent everything," Wilkerson said. "We had something that worked and it didn't need changing."

Certainly Stanford is due for a wayward week, and certainly USC found a new level of confidence after cruising upfield and downfield at Notre Dame.

Still, Stanford's shadow will darken the Coliseum long before the team takes the field.

Kickoff is at 5 p.m. Saturday. By 8, will you know where your Trojans are?