

# Taylor delivers a rap on, off the field

By Elliott Almond, Mercury News

Stanford fans know him as the unassuming running back who replaced school-record holder Toby Gerhart.

Now meet the "other" Stepfan Taylor, the comedic rapper and freestyle dancer who likes to go by the nickname, "Kulabafi."

The guy who once jumped on stage of a high school talent show to help a friend sing Hank Williams Jr.'s "A Country Boy Can Survive."

Taylor, a science, technology and society major, has been as busy making YouTube dance videos as he has on the football field this season in helping fourth-ranked Stanford earn a berth in the Fiesta Bowl on Monday against No. 3 Oklahoma State.

"People have to get used to me," said Taylor, a 5-foot-11, 208-pound junior. "On the field it's kind of serious, but on the sideline I'm keeping people loose."

The player who addresses elders with "yes sirs" and "no sirs" is the same one found on a video wearing thick black glasses and red tennis shoes attracting a crowd while dancing on a street in San Francisco.

He has been dancing on the football field the past two years with consecutive 1,000-yard seasons despite sharing the workload with three other quality ballcarriers. Taylor has a chance to become only the second Stanford rusher in history to have three 1,000-yard seasons when he returns next season. The other, Darrin Nelson, played in the late 1970s and early '80s.

With attention focused on two-time Heisman runner-up Andrew Luck, Taylor has become one of Stanford's most prolific backs without fanfare.

Coach David Shaw describes him as one of the country's most underrated backs. The Mansfield, Texas, player didn't even establish himself as the primary rusher until the fourth game of the 2010 season.

"He does everything well, everything right," Shaw said. "At some point he will get his just due, but at the same time he doesn't care."

Running backs coach Mike Sanford Jr. speculates Taylor could have much bigger numbers if he had a similar workload to Gerhart's. But Cardinal coaches have no plans to deviate from rotating backs next season with Anthony Wilkerson and Taylor returning, and junior Tyler Gaffney considering playing another year depending on whether he signs a major league baseball contract. Also, Stanford has sophomore Ricky Seale and freshmen Remound Wright and Kelsey Young competing for playing time.

The polite, team-first Taylor demurs when asked about his chances of becoming the school's first 2,000-yard ground gainer next year. He'll only say that he's considered the possibilities.

"I don't think I have reached my potential, either," Taylor said. "You can't become complacent."

Taylor wasted no time acclimating to college football as Gerhart's primary backup as a freshman in 2009. He spent the season studying the bulldozing rusher now with the Minnesota Vikings.

Gerhart told his stand-in to have patience. "Just know what is coming ahead of the snap so I could play faster instead of thinking about it too much," Taylor said.

Four years ago at Mansfield High, he didn't have to think at all. The Tigers called "18 pitch" whenever they struggled and let Taylor take it from there.

"He was like a Kobe Bryant on the football field," Mansfield teammate Greg Black recalled.

Taylor gained a school single-season record 2,463 yards and had 33 touchdowns as a senior to lead Mansfield to the third round of the state playoffs, the school's best showing in its 100-year history.

It wasn't always so easy. Skyla Taylor, his mother, recalled how Stepfan (pronounced STEF-on) would cry because he didn't want to go to football practice in third grade.

She insisted he continue. The single mom also was a stickler with school. Skyla Taylor, who had to drop out of community college after getting pregnant, wouldn't accept grades from her children lower than an A-minus. Taylor's sister, Kayla, has attracted interest from Ivy League schools after finishing fourth in the state in the shot put and discus the past two years.

Taylor excelled in the classroom but didn't consider Stanford until a school guidance counselor encouraged him to pursue it. At first he wasn't interested because Taylor thought Stanford was in the Ivy League. But he took an unofficial visit to Palo Alto and "didn't go anywhere else after I came here." Now the "Kulabafi" act could be on hold for a while longer. The way Taylor is running, his next stop might be in the NFL in 2013.