

College Football

# Marks brings emotion to WSU's Air Raid offense

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS  
Associated Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — After Washington State's Gabe Marks caught the touchdown pass that made him the leading receiver in the history of the Pacific-12 Conference, the referees yelled at him to return the football.

"No, it's my ball," he told the refs, in a move that surprised no one who knows the fiery receiver.

If quarterback Luke Falk is the field general of the Air Raid offense, Marks is the emotional and intellectual voice of the No. 23 Cougars.

It was little surprise that the 295th reception of Marks' stellar career, breaking the Pac-12 mark of 294 set by Nelson Spruce of Colorado, was a touchdown in Washington State's 56-21 rout of California on Nov. 12.

The touchdown "works out better as a story," Marks said after the game.

"I wasn't feeling all blushy and stuff, all romantic or anything," Marks said when asked how he felt about

the Pac-12 receptions record. "It was cool. I appreciated the cheers from the fans and everything and the acknowledgement for it."

The senior caught six more passes in Washington State's loss to No. 9 Colorado last Saturday, bringing his career total to 301. He is just the 13th receiver in FBS history, and the only one from the Pac-12, with more than 300 catches. His 3,314 yards are ninth-most in league history.

Marks is sure to be a prime target when the Cougars host rival No. 6 Washington today in the annual Apple Cup, with the winner claiming the Pac-12 North title and a shot at the Rose Bowl.

While some athletes downplay the pursuit of records, Marks said chasing the Pac-12 receptions standard gave him an extra spark.

"I used that energy to make plays," Marks said. "It doesn't make me nervous or anything."

Offensive lineman Cole Madison noted Marks brings extra energy to the team and will call out players who aren't putting out the required effort.



In this Nov. 12, 2016, file photo, Washington State wide receiver Gabe Marks (9) makes a catch for a touchdown while defended by California cornerback Ashtyn Davis (27) during the second half of an NCAA college football game in Pullman, Wash.

"Gabe Marks is a real football player," Madison said.

The 6-foot, 190-pound Marks grew up in Venice, California, where he was a star player despite his modest size. He was 9 years old

when his father was killed in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles in 2004.

When Leach was hired to rebuild the woeful Washington State program after the 2011 season, one of the first

scholarships he offered was to Marks.

"Mike Leach is really cool," Marks said. "I committed before I even took a visit."

"It's been a long time coming and it is a great team award," Leach said of the receiving record, noting the quarterbacks, blockers and other receivers involved in plays where Marks caught passes. "He is a great representative. He's very competitive, hangs in there, battles away."

Marks played immediately, catching 49 passes for 560 yards as a freshman. He caught 74 passes for 807 yards as a sophomore.

But entering his junior year, he was behind Isiah Myers on the depth chart. He also suffered from health problems, and the decision was made to redshirt.

He chafed at times, but the decision was for the best, Marks said.

Marks had a breakout season last year, watching 104 passes for 1,192 yards and 15 touchdowns as Washington posted a 9-4 record. He was an All-Pac-12 selection.

Asked to identify the key

components of the Cougars, Marks riffed on an improved running game, positive chemistry and the defense's ability to generate turnovers. He also noted the play of quarterback Luke Falk, who Marks tagged earlier as "the Messiah."

"Everything is going according to plan," Marks said. "What's not to like?"

Marks and Leach have been known to jaw at each other on the sidelines, but they have a mutual respect.

"We talk about a lot of things," Marks said.

"He's a brilliant guy," Leach said. "He thinks independently. He would actually be a pretty good coach someday."

Marks had a few games left in his college career, and he wants to make the most of them.

"It's about just winning games now," Marks said. "I've kind of done everything that I can do in my reach."

He was asked how it felt to be tied for first place in the Pac-12 North.

"It's better than sitting in last place in mid-November with nothing to play for," Marks said. "That would suck."

# SENIORS: Football team 30-13 last four years

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been a key part for the deep playoff run.

"Everybody wants to be the quarterback or running back, but it's the other guys that make the car go," Salas said. "Without the line those guys can't go, and without a defense those guys don't get the ball much."

Last week's game against Kennedy was a prime example of how deep the Tigers go. Guys such as Angel and Shelby contributed five tackles-for-loss to help keep Kennedy's dangerous rush offense at bay, and it was the all-senior

offensive line that plowed holes as wide as the state of Montana for guys like Monkus and Grogan to run through.

"I always tell my guys that 'I don't need a superman out there, I just need 11 guys to do their jobs and these guys do that,'" Salas said. "Nobody cares who scores as long as it's our team that does it."

As their senior years at Stanfield near the halfway point, it's hard not to think about the legacy this group will leave behind. On the gridiron, most notably, Stanfield has compiled a

30-13 overall record to this point with a 5-2 postseason record as well as the first league title since the 1950s.

"These kids will go down in the history books of Stanfield not only for being great athletes but great people too," Salas said.

"Every day they come to learn and come to practice to get better, and that mindset really sets them apart. They just never stop working."

But on Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m. on the Kennison Field turf in Hermiston, the group could bring home the highest accolade yet by winning a

state football title for the first time since 1957.

"It'd be a great feeling," said senior lineman Noe Sanchez. "Knowing it's been 59 years since the last title and knowing that there's been many great teams here in Stanfield but knowing that this senior class and this team is the one that won the state championship and that we left it all out there and won that ring, that'd be the greatest feeling of all."

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## Athlete of the Week

### Twenty questions with Stanfield's Justin Keeney

East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Justin Keeney has been a key contributor for the Stanfield Tigers on both sides of the ball in 2016.

His versatility and reliability was on full display in the 2A semifinals on Saturday, Nov. 19 when Keeney ran for 14 yards and one touchdown on offense and also led the defense with 6.5 total tackles and a key interception in the third quarter that clinched Stanfield's win. For his efforts, Keeney has been selected as this week's East Oregonian Athlete of the Week.

East Oregonian: When did you start playing football?

Justin Keeney: Back in fifth grade, my mom told me I should try it and I thought it sounded interesting and I've been playing ever since.

What positions did you start playing at?

I think running back and linebacker.

Do you play any other sports and what is your favorite?

Baseball and I don't really have a favorite, I like them both.

What's more exciting as a two-way player, scoring a touchdown or catching an interception?

Intercepting is a lot more rare and it feels really good to know that you did your job and had the guy covered.

Any sports superstitions?

I just try not to eat a lot.

If you could attend any sporting event what would you pick?

Probably the Super Bowl.

Do you have a favorite professional or college team?

San Francisco 49ers

Favorite athlete?

None

If you could try any sport that you have not yet played, what would you pick?

Tennis

Who would you pick for a fantasy prom date?

My girlfriend

Favorite food?

Pepperoni pizza

Least favorite food?

Artichokes

Favorite Thanksgiving food?

Apple pie

Any hobbies outside of sports?

Robotics

What would you like to do for a career?

Probably something with computers.

Favorite subject in school?

I like math and science.

If you were in charge of running your school, what is one thing you would change?

Not much, I really like the way things are now.

Favorite movie?

"Star Wars" saga

Favorite TV show?

"Stranger Things"

Favorite place in Oregon?

Any place in the mountains.

# HOME: 1A match-up sealed placement of game

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Kennison Field in Hermiston and frankly couldn't believe it.

"I thought it would be in Hillsboro for sure," Stanfield coach Davie Salas said this week. "It's nice we get a little bit of love out here and hopefully we'll have support from all the eastern Oregon people."

On the surface, the decision seemed like a puzzling one, especially for people in Regis' corner. The No. 1 seed Rams — who will play as the home team on Saturday — will have to make the four-plus hour bus ride to the game, while the No. 2 seed Tigers will be the ones with the home-game atmosphere

most likely.

OSAA Assistant Executive Director Brad Garrett told the East Oregonian by email that determining the location for the game "is not an exact science," and there are many factors that go into determining the location.

"Staff must consider parking, ticketing, seating capacity, press box configuration, internet capability, team lodging options, travel options, and potential weather conditions when making site decisions," Garrett said. "(And) OSAA policy dictates that all semifinal and championship football games be played on a neutral field with an artificial surface."

However the key reason

for Hermiston getting the draw was because of the 1A championship match-up featuring two central and eastern Oregon schools with Dufur and Crane. It was a similar situation that allowed Hermiston to draw the 1A, 2A, and 3A championships in 2015.

"Our goal is to play at minimum a double header at each site selected — this reduces cost and maximizes the reimbursement back to participating schools," Garrett said. "We would fully expect that placing the game in Hermiston should have a positive impact on gate receipts because we are reducing the travel burden for three of the four teams and minimizing the burden on as

many people as possible is always the goal."

The Tigers are hoping that the location draws in not only more Stanfield residents and fans, but people from nearby towns and possibly share in their celebration of a state championship.

"Knowing that we're going to have our whole community there at the game, have all of Hermiston cheering for us, it's a huge advantage for us," Stanfield senior Noe Sanchez said. "Now we just have to go out there and win the game."

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# WAGNER: Diet, boxing part of offseason changes

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week in the Seahawks' win over Philadelphia.

He's on pace to shatter the franchise's single-season mark for tackles and has already become the first player in Seattle history with five straight seasons with at least 100 tackles.

On a defense filled with stars such as Richard Sherman, Cliff Avril and Michael Bennett, Wagner is finding a way to stand out above others.

"He just keeps balling. He just keeps playing really good football," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "His game plan preparation is there, he's taking advantage of all of that. He's really on the mark on his fits and stuff in the

running game.

"He's a fantastic athlete. I think this is a result of scheme awareness, growth, good guys playing around him and probably the heightened level of his preparation just because he is just more experienced now."

Wagner didn't feel slighted two years ago when he was selected as a first-team All-Pro despite missing five games with a painful toe injury. But last season his game appeared to slip.

He had 114 tackles in 15 games — a number he's almost surpassed already this season — and had just one half-sack. Wagner wasn't making the impact on the field he expected.

So this offseason was all about revamping his process.

"I just felt like I had a different approach I was tired of being disrespected and changed my eating, started boxing, and then I think I found a lot of peace in life," Wagner said.

"Just different things, family situations and things like that. Just a lot of things that came into it. I can't really pinpoint one thing."

Along with changing his eating, Wagner increased the amount of boxing, yoga and swimming in his exercise routine, activities he's trying to continue during the regular season.

"I feel like I finally got a routine with massages, and yoga and swimming, and all these different things that I do. I think it has helped me

not get hurt," Wagner said.

Wagner is quick to acknowledge the play of Seattle's defensive tackles as a big reason why he's been able to record so many stops.

Tony McDaniel, Jarran Reed and Ahtyba Rubin have all done their part in occupying offensive linemen and keeping them from getting to the second level and blocking the linebackers.

Of the 657 total combined tackles recorded by Seattle's defense this season, Wagner and fellow linebacker K.J. Wright have been in on 195 of them — nearly 30 percent.

"He's an athlete," Seattle defensive coordinator Kris Richard said. "Whenever you get an athlete in space you just allow them be who they are."

# MARINERS: Segura was All-Star in 2013 with Brewers

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season, tied with Minnesota for worst in the majors. He joins a rotation that includes ace Zack Greinke, Shelby Miller, Patrick Corbin and Archie Bradley.

The Diamondbacks finished 69-93 last season, fourth in the NL West.

A touted prospect, the 24-year-old Walker went 8-11 with a 4.22 ERA and

119 strikeouts in 25 starts for Seattle last season. He would be outstanding one game and then struggle the next.

"Young, controllable pitching is hard to find, and adding Taijuan to the rotation gives us significant depth in that area," new Arizona general manager Mike Hazen said.

Segura, an All-Star in 2013 with Milwaukee, is an immediate upgrade at shortstop for Seattle, which went 86-76

last season and finished three games out of a playoff spot. He hit .319 with 20 home runs, 33 stolen bases and 63 RBIs for the Diamondbacks, who acquired him from the Brewers in a January trade.

Segura spent most of last season at second base for the Diamondbacks, but will move back to shortstop with the Mariners.

"This trade made more sense for where our roster is,

and Jean Segura fit this club about as well as any player we were looking at," Dipoto said.

Going into the offseason, Seattle thought its starting pitching depth was enviable. Now the Mariners will need to find supplemental arms after dealing Walker.

"Most of our focus, if not our primary focus, from now until opening day is going to be left toward the pitching staff," Dipoto said.

## ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

# JUSTIN KEENEY

**Stanfield  
Junior Football**

**Keeney tallied a team-high 6.5 total tackles and one interception and also ran for a touchdown to lead Stanfield over Kennedy 32-13 in the 2A semifinals on Saturday.**

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