

Dream Maker: Decision wasn't easy

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knowing that I was so close.

"I would like to thank the fans. They have done a lot for me, giving me pats on the back after the games. I would like to thank the University of Oregon for recruiting me and giving me the opportunity to go to school and do what I do best and that's play football."

The decision to become the first Oregon football player to enter the draft as an underclassman was not any easy one, said Wheaton. Leaving behind his teammates was the hardest to handle and at one point he even apologized to safety Jaiya Figueras, who was one of the players in attendance.

"The past three weeks I haven't been able to sleep," Wheaton said. "I changed my decision maybe 10 or 12 times a day. It was like that until two days ago and now I am happy with my decision. I just hope everybody can respect my decision. You don't have to agree with me, but just respect my decision and hopefully wish me the best. It is something I feel I have to do."

"I think he is making a good decision," said Figueras, who was Wheaton's roommate for two years and one of the players who voted Wheaton as the team's 1996 Most Valuable Player. "Not one person wants to see him go, but everybody on the team is for him. Without him we wouldn't have gone to the Rose Bowl."

Oregon head coach Mike Belotti was away at a coaches' conference and, therefore, unable to attend the news conference. But assistant head coach Neal Zoumboukos gave a brief statement.

"Everybody associated with the University of Oregon athletic department and football program is tremendously disappointed that Kenny will not be with our team next year," Zoumboukos said. "We all felt that his position in the draft would be greatly enhanced with another year at the University of Oregon."

"But, having said that, we also recognize the tremendous contribution that Kenny has made to our program and this University. We respect his decision and we will work in every way to support Kenny and to help him achieve his goals."

An inquiry to the NFL by Wheaton showed that he is being projected as a high second-round to low third-round draft pick. If he were to stick around for another year, he could possibly improve his draft status and get into the first round where the contracts are a little richer and the signing bonuses have a few more zeros after them.

"I'm honest with myself," Wheaton said. "I know there is a good chance that I won't go in the first round. I'm not going to sit here and say money doesn't mean anything. It's good if you can get millions of bucks, but my dream

out-weighs the money. If I only play one year I'll be able to say that I reached my dream. I'll be able to live life knowing that I set out to do something years ago and I worked until I got there."

Wheaton was such a respected player in the Pacific-10 Conference for his on-the-field talents that opposing quarterbacks rarely tested him this past season. But he was still able to collect a career-high 73 tackles and intercept two passes, one he ran back for touchdown.

Even though Wheaton will not be leaving with a degree in hand, he is committed to finishing school and earning his diploma.

"The day I left home, Aug. 3, 1993, I promised my mom that I would come back home with an education," Wheaton said. "And it hurts that I am going to be leaving without it right now. But I promised her this time that if it's the last thing I do, I will get my education."

Wheaton, who was named a second team All-American by the Associated Press this past year, leaves Oregon as one of the greatest defensive backs to play for the Ducks. He will forever be enshrined in the minds of all Oregon football fans for "The Pick," an interception and ensuing touchdown run in the Ducks' upset of the Washington Huskies in 1994's Rose Bowl campaign.

Frank: Possible injury worried Oregon standout

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teammates deserve better than that."

Wheaton said having to leave his teammates behind was the hardest decision to make.

"My teammates. That's what hurts worst," Wheaton said. "Coming in with my buddy Jaiya Figueras we had a lot of dreams, but sorry man. I gotta go."

Figueras was one of the handful of players who attended Wheaton's announcement.

Probably the biggest reason for Wheaton's exit from the college ranks was the chance of a serious injury during his would-be senior season.

In his three years, Wheaton has suffered numerous injuries, and if he was to stay at Oregon, who is to say that he

wouldn't suffer a career-ending injury next season.

"I don't think I would be able to live with myself if I came back and got injured, knowing that I was so close," Wheaton said.

Some fans may call Wheaton's departure to the NFL a tragedy for the Oregon football team, but what truly would be a tragedy is if Wheaton was denied his dream to play in the NFL by suffering a career-ending injury.

Thanks for the great memories.

Good luck, Kenny.

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NHL: Kennedy's problems surfaced in April

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Graham James committed, was he stole ... youth," said Kennedy's wife, Jana.

Coming to grips with his past, including weekly visits to a psychiatrist, has been a battle for Kennedy.

"I feel like I am 10 months old inside a 27-year-old body," Kennedy said. "You are learning to live again. You are learning to have friends and you have to learn to love and relax. ... I can't remember the last day I relaxed totally."

Kennedy, whose problems first surfaced last April as a member of the Calgary Flames, made the right decision by coming forward, said former teammate Ron Stern.

"It's great for Sheldon to get it out in the open, get it off his chest," Stern said.

"He's a brave kid to come up and talk about it and deal with it. Who knows if it'll ever heal. This

is the start of a long process for him."

But a source close to the police investigation told the Calgary Herald that some players who may have been attacked by James were advised by their agents and lawyers not to step forward because it would ruin their careers and harm the NHL.

"The league is not offering that advice," NHL spokesman Arthur Pincus said Saturday.

"We're concerned the whole affair is a very serious matter. As far as specifics, we have no comment on what the RCMP has implied."

Kennedy, who had a career-high 19 goals for Detroit in 1992-93 and spent the last two seasons with Calgary, was given leave by the Bruins so he could attend James' trial.

He missed three games and will also miss a game against Philadelphia on Tuesday because of a neck injury.

Hoops: Provost eliminated then reinstated program

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not my decision; it was the conference's decision."

Following Tuesday night's win, Rutgers-Camden Coach Ray Pace said: "It's just the beginning. We've been through some tough times."

"I knew it was just a matter of time, and I don't want any credit for this," he said. "It was all the players."

Freshman Dawan Boxley was truly optimistic.

"We're on a one-game winning streak," he said.

Another conference member — in fact the team from the Rutgers-Newark campus — held the previous Division III losing-streak record: 47 straight during the 1983 through 1985 seasons.

Wilson returned as coach last season, but stepped down in January, citing health problems. He lost 50 pounds and his wife got worried when he would yell out the names of his players in his

sleep.

In 18-plus years, Wilson had a record of 187-273 with Camden. He led the Pioneers to NAIA District 31 championships in 1972 and 1976.

The losses continued under Pace, an assistant who replaced Wilson as head coach. Pace played for Rutgers in the 1970s, scoring more than 1,000 points over two seasons.

The situation got so bad that university Provost Walter K. Gordon, after calling the situation "demoralizing" and a "lost cause," announced that the school was eliminating the program.

A few days later, he changed his mind — with a little push from student leaders and alumni — and reinstated the program.

Gordon said one of the reasons he decided to eliminate the program was that the losing team received more notice than the academic program at Rutgers-Camden.

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