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UW lineman forgoes senior season

Washington offensive lineman Benji Olson said he feels ready for the next level

By Jim Cour
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — The big money of pro football is tearing apart the Washington Huskies' offensive line. They're going to lose their second All-America lineman to the NFL.

Benji Olson, a 6-foot-4, 310-pound guard whose nickname is "Road Grader" because of his run-blocking prowess, announced Tuesday that he will pass up his senior season to enter April's draft.

Earlier, All-America center Olin Kreutz said he would forego his senior season to play pro football.

And it could get worse for Washington coach Jim Lambright, whose team lost its final three regular-season games before beating Michigan State 51-23 in the Aloha Bowl on Christmas Day.

Washington's third-year sophomore quarterback, Brock Huard, scheduled a news conference on campus Wednesday to announce if he will leave with two seasons of eligibility left to make himself available for the

draft. "I feel I'm ready," said Olson, a two-time All-America. "I've been here for four years, have started for three and have accomplished a lot."

Lambright lost running back Corey Dillon to the NFL a year early after the 1996 season after seeing free safety Lawyer Milloy depart with a season



left following the '95 season. "There's no doubt in our mind that he's an NFL-type talent," Lambright said of Olson, who played last season after undergoing back surgery. "As always, you'd like to be selfish and keep him, but that is Benji's decision."

Lambright said Olson came on strong in the second half of this season and played his best game of the year in the Aloha Bowl. He helped Rashaan Shehee rush for a bowl-record 193 yards on 29 carries against Michigan State.

"We'll be watching Benji road grade a few NFL defensive linemen now," Lambright said.

Olson's decision was an easy one for Lambright to understand. The player is going to get a lot of money to play a game he played for free for the Huskies.

"Road Grader" will be able to pave his road with dollar bills af

ter the draft.

"I would imagine Benji will probably make more than everybody in this room makes," Lambright said at Olson's news conference.

Olson, 22, from South Kitsap High School in Port Orchard, Wash., didn't have as strong a season as a junior as he did as a sophomore, when Washington went 9-3 and went to the Holiday Bowl. But after missing spring practice after back surgery, he didn't miss a game as the Huskies posted an 8-4 record this season.

He didn't miss a game in his three-season Huskies career.

For the second year in a row, Washington led the Pac-10 in least sacks allowed. In addition, Olson helped Huard and the Huskies set a school single-season passing record with 2,790 yards.

He said doctors had told him his back was 100 percent now.

"I've always had the dream to be one of the best football players I could be," he said. "That's why I chose to go on so I can see how really good I am."

Brad Hutt, a 6-3, 285-pound junior, is expected to replace Olson in Washington's offensive line next season. Hutt was Olson's backup in the Aloha Bowl.

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1:00-1:50					Body Sculpt 220 GER Kim
2:00-2:50					Dance Aerobics Mind-Body Fitness 220 GER Melissa
5:00-5:50	Dance Aerobics Mind-Body Fitness 220 GER Melissa	Body Sculpt 220 GER Maggie	Dance Aerobics 220 GER Melissa	Body Sculpt 220 GER Maggie	
6:00-6:50	Intermed. Step 220 GER Dee	Intermed. Step 220 GER Dee	Intermed. Step 220 GER Maggie	Intermed. Step 220 GER Dee	

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