

How Luke Wattenberg is the Huskies' 'Secret Weapon'

By Dan Raley

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Behind the hulking 6-foot-5, 300-pound frame, well hidden beneath the long locks, is a Luke Wattenberg nobody knows — except those he encounters on the college football field.

On FOX College Football this week, University of Washington football coach Jimmy Lake felt compelled to reveal his starting center for all to see.

“He’s like this really nice guy in the hallways and at lunch,” Lake said. “On the practice field, I’m like an MMA referee. It’s like, ‘Luke, what are you doing? It’s your teammate.’ I’m trying to pull him back and pull him off guys.”

There were laughs all around emanating from a FOX football panel that included former USC Trojans Matt Leinhart and Reggie Bush.

The question posed from Leinhart was who were a couple of Husky breakout players that not everyone normally would identify?

Lake was only so happy to oblige. He picked out sophomore cornerback Kyler Gordon on defense, describing him as the most athletic defensive back that he’s ever coached.

On offense, the coach settled on Wattenberg as someone to consider, not so much for his football emergence but for his low-key approach that might cause people to underestimate him.

To hear Lake tell it, Wattenberg almost comes off like the Charlie Watts of the Huskies, like the late Rolling Stones drummer who shared in his band’s success but wanted no part of the limelight.

Or Luke resembles a big Ninja, a covert operator who silently goes about his business dismantling defensive lines. It doesn’t hurt in this comparison that he’s Japanese-American.

The sixth-year senior from Trabuco Canyon, California, a returning All-Pac-12 honorable-mention selection, recently acknowledged he has a somewhat unemotional approach to what can be a violent world. He chooses to pick his spots in displaying what’s inside.

“I wouldn’t say I’m a vocal leader,” he said. “I try to lead by example. When I do speak, I try to make it count.”

Yet Wattenberg allowed overall how he’s come out of his shell some, how he’s more willing to share himself with others, how he had ready proof to prove his point.

“When I first came here, I wouldn’t talk at all,” he said with a sly smile, looking out at a room full of media members. “Now I’m up here talking to you guys.”

UW Roster Review, No. 0-99: Luke Wattenberg Is the True Husky Ironman

By Dan Raley

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Luke Wattenberg owns the longest hair of any University of Washington football player, depending on the fluff in Asa Turner's stringy mane on any given day, and the longest game-day bio of any Husky.

He's back for a sixth college football season, an amazing fifth year as a UW starter, and he's just now beginning to draw individual honors. He's played in more games (42) and started more of them (36) than any other active player in Montlake.

Wattenberg, if he can stay healthy for another full regular-season schedule, stands to start and appear in more games than anyone else in program history. He would surpass cornerback Desmond Trufant, a first-teamer in 47 of 50 games played in 2009-2012 and now in the NFL.

This snapper is the true Husky Ironman.

The 6-foot-5, 295-pound Wattenberg from Trabuco Canyon, California, possesses as much football talent as he does collegiate endurance. Some analysts list him among the nation's top 20 offensive linemen and have graded him out as the Pac-12's top center.

He's the man in the middle of five returning Husky starters and part of the heaviest offensive line fielded by the school.

"Any time you can spend two years around the same guys, all five guys, it's a big deal," Wattenberg said. "We all have had game experience, no rookies really, and it's awesome."

Going down the roster in numerical order, this is another of our post-spring assessments of all of the Husky talent at hand, gleaned from a month of observations, as a way to keep everyone engaged during the offseason.

Wattenberg wears No. 76, a jersey he has all to himself. Offensive linemen Kurt Gegner, Mike Briggs, Joe Sanford and Benji Olson previously made it noteworthy. No one will have it longer than its current wearer.

A longstanding pillar of UW football, first for coach Chris Petersen and now Jimmy Lake, Wattenberg started at left guard for a pair of seasons and, as a redshirt freshman, at left tackle, the lineman's NFL money position.

During the peak of the pandemic, Wattenberg kept his game together using a makeshift weight room he and his father assembled in the family garage in California.

He returned to Seattle and next made the smooth transition to center, replacing NFL-bound Nick Harris, without any hiccups.

"It's probably my favorite position I've played here," he said of hiking the ball.

A noted hard worker, Wattenberg has maintained his superior strength all along, even sharing the top hang clean on the team with inside linebacker Edefuan Ulofoshio in this past spring's Husky Combine. Both hoisted 365 pounds.

Wattenberg, who was selected Pac-12 Offensive Lineman of the Week last season for his performance in a 44-27 victory over Arizona, will bring his lengthy follicles, vast experience and offensive-line versatility back for one more go-around.

"I think I like him the most at center," UW offensive-line coach Scott Huff said. "So I feel good about him. He's making improvements every day."

Barring any unforeseen NCAA eligibility extensions, Wattenberg soon will move on to the next football level and his Husky departure will be a strange thing indeed. The NFL, however, will be glad to welcome his dependability and maybe put him to work for six years or more..

Wattenberg's 2021 Outlook: Projected starting center

UW Service Time: Played in 42 games, started 36

Stats: 2 tackles

Individual Honors: All-Pac-12 honorable mention

Pro prospects: 2022 NFL third-day draftee

A Moment with Luke Wattenberg: The Huskies' Man in the Middle

By Dan Raley

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Nothing much bothers Luke Wattenberg, one of the more agreeable University of Washington football players.

Need a left tackle?

No problem.

How about a left guard?

Sign me up.

Can we interest you in the center position?

Just show him how to do it.

"It's probably my favorite position I've played here," Wattenberg said of hiking the ball.

And he's played a lot for the Huskies.

Taking advantage of the pandemic free pass, the 6-foot-5, 300-pounder from Trabuco Canyon, California, enters his sixth season at the UW, and his fifth as a starting player.

When he's done, Wattenberg will have played for the Huskies for as long as his first coach, Chris Petersen, coached them.

Not even the pandemic could discourage him.

Again, he just rolled with the situation and made the best of it.

"We got sent home for spring break and I was told not to come back," he said. "I just pretended like I was here every day. I took my diet really seriously. I worked on the center stuff. I worked back home with my old high school coach. It was good. It was a good offseason."

As he approaches season six, Wattenberg has started more games than any other Husky, 36, which is five more than his nearest longevity challenger, tight end Cade Otton.

He couldn't leave the UW just yet. He's just beginning to be recognized for his skill set, earning preseason accolades as one of the nation's top 20 offensive linemen.

He's also part of a pair of Husky football milestones.

Wattenberg is a member of the biggest offensive line in school history, though he's the smallest of the five starters.

And he's belongs to the first UW line to return all five starters in six decades.

"Any time you can spend two years around the same guys, all five guys, it's a big deal," Wattenberg said. "We've all had game experience. There are no rookies. It's awesome."