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Lon Howard standing out on offense: possible all-conference choice?

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HOWARD STANDING OUT ON OFFENSE:
POSSIBLE ALL-CONFERENCE CHOICE?

MISSOULA--

Lon Howard had never played college offense until he came to the University of Montana to play under Coach Jack Swarthout.

Unril coming to the Missoula school, Lon had apparently found his place at defensive linebacker, both in high school at Centralia, Washington, where he played for Coach Frank Smith, and at Grays Harbor Junior College, where he played under Coach Jack Elway, now an assistant at Montana, and earned All-State Junior College honors.

Swarthout, Elway and assistants Wally Brown, Bill Betcher and Pinky Erickson decided that Howard would do them more good at offensive tackle, if he could handle the change.

Brown, who works with the offensive line, put it this way.

"We knew Lon was big (225 pounds) and fast enough to play the kind of offensive tackle we wanted," he said. "But we still had to find out if he could make the change and keep the desire he had when he played linebacker."

Howard made the change quickly and successfully. Through the first six Grizzly games, he has been the most consistent performer, according to Brown, in the Grizzly offensive line.

"On our sweeps to the left, the tight end (Jim Kelly) will ordinarily try to delay the defensive right end," Wally explained, "while Lon pulls and leads the play.

"He was in front when Willie Jones scored our third touchdown against Idaho State, and our first against North Dakota."

Brown also gives Howard credit as an outstanding blocker protecting the quarterback on a passing play.

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"Lon has progressed at an amazing rate, and he's still learning," Brown said. "He'll be with us again next year, and it's going to take quite a ball player to move him out of the starting lineup."

And Howard's duties don't stop with offensive line work. If anything ever happens to punter Dewey Allen, Lon can step in and do a great job of punting.

"We think Lon's performances this year should definitely make him a genuine candidate for All-Big Sky honors," Brown said. "And we know we can count on him for more outstanding work in the final four games."

How does Howard feel about all this?

"I sort of missed playing linebacker at first," Howard said, "but you get a great deal of satisfaction out of making a key block or protecting the quarterback on a successful pass play. And if you throw a key block on a scoring play, you almost feel like you scored yourself."

And what does he think of this year's Grizzly football team?

"Everybody's in there fighting to win, and it's paid off so far," Howard said. "We know we've already surprised a lot of people, but we're going to surprise a lot more before we're done."

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