



Where Are They Now: Mike Catapano **Catch up with the Former Jet from Long Island**

Jim Gehman

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Mike Catapano was raised in a baseball family in Bayville on Long Island, with his dad, Michael, being a pitcher, and his grandfather, Michael, being a Mets season ticket holder at Shea Stadium.

But...

"My grandfather used to have a flower nursery in Bethpage, and occasionally he would wear a Jets jacket and we'd watch the Jets games," Catapano said. "And so I kind of just picked up the Jets after just seeing that my grandfather was watching them.

"I was the first football player in the family. In (Chaminade) high school, I was a running back, and my favorite player ended up being Curtis Martin. So I will claim that I was a Jets fan growing up."

A two-time captain and the 2012 Ivy League Player of the Year at Princeton, Catapano, a defensive end who had a league-high 12 sacks, was selected in the seventh round of the 2013 NFL Draft by Kansas City. The first player chosen from the university in 12 years.

After spending two years with the Chiefs, missing the second season because of what was described as a non-football illness, Catapano was released and chose to head back home to New York and sign with the Jets.

"We kind of felt comfortable with going to the Jets even though they wanted me initially on the practice squad," Catapano said. "We felt one of the issues with the Chiefs was my lack of fit in that true 3-4 outside linebacker spot. (New York's Head Coach) Todd Bowles was a little bit more get up the field and hybrid and one gap-type scheme. So we felt good about the team fit." In his first season with the Jets, Catapano was promoted from the practice squad for their Week 11 game in Houston.

"I remember just looking at myself in the mirror (inside the NRG Stadium's visitor's locker room) and looking at that Jets jersey It's just a different feeling when it's your home team and when you're representing New York. It was a little surreal. I mean, it was definitely surreal," Catapano laughed.

"I was promoted two days before the game. I was ready to go. Throw me in. And they threw me in for a couple pass-rushing situations. It was great. I felt comfortable and proud."

A Jet for two seasons, Catapano's fondest memory with the Green & White is also a bittersweet memory. It occurred in Week 13 of the 2015 season when the Giants hosted the Jets at MetLife Stadium.

"I literally had everyone I'd ever known growing up in New York at this Jets-Giants game. And I sacked (Giants quarterback) Eli Manning (for a three-yard loss late in the first half of) the game and was feeling great," Catapano said of the Jets' 23-20 overtime win. "That's the high. And

then, literally, on the very next play, I took a weird cut and suffered a Lisfranc injury. So a very high followed by a very low. My season was over after that."

Even though that was the second straight year Catapano ended his season on I.R., he always kept a positive attitude.

"It was just my upbringing, how I was raised. The environment I was in and the coaches that I had. It was always no other option. Keep pushing and go get it if you want it," Catapano said.

"So, to me, it was just another step back. I was never one to be deterred really by anything.

"Even at Princeton, it was, 'You sure you want to take your shot at the NFL? Nobody's been drafted from there for a very long time.' Well, yeah. I was never was one to listen to anyone else. Kind of stubborn and naïve, I guess. That's just how I was made."

At Princeton and then in the NFL for five years with the Chiefs, Jets, and Houston Texans, what makes the defensive end turned outside linebacker most proud of his football career?

"One of the things is being the first person from Princeton selected in (the Draft in) over a decade. So being able to kind of put the school back on the map as a relevant football school, the oldest college football program in the country, that was really, really proud for me," Catapano said.

"Going to the playoffs and turning the Chiefs around the first year with (Head Coach) Andy (Reid) was a highlight, as well.

"And then coming over and playing for the Jets and getting a chance to start games, it was a dream come true. I only played for five seasons, but it felt like a lot for me as the always will be underdog. And I enjoyed every minute of it. Fought for every minute of it. So I'm really proud, ultimately, of how hard I gave everything to the game. That's the only reason why I lasted as long as I did. I left it all out there."

Following football, Catapano went from the locker room to the library, and enrolled at St John's University School of Law, which he graduated from in 2021.

"I think that what really separated me on a football field was that I was able to perform well in clutch situations. I'm a competitor. That's what I am. I prepare. I compete. And I usually win because of how hard I prepare and how hard I compete," Catapano said.

"So just kind of stepping back, what are my competitive attributes and what do I want to do next? I know I have to compete. So maybe I should compete in a big way for big matters and big disputes. So if somebody took me on to go in there and win when it's really a make or break case for a company, that's really where I saw myself maximizing on my competitive attributes."

After gaining experience as an extern for the Deputy Chief of the Eastern District of New York's U.S. Attorney's office and as a judicial intern with the Honorable Joseph F. Bianco of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, Catapano is now an associate with the national firm, McKool Smith. Working out of their New York office, he focuses on complex commercial litigation.

"The range of disputes that the company litigates both on the plaintiff's side and the defendant's side, we win cases our clients really can't afford to lose," he said. "McKool Smith has a strong reputation of commercial trial work. I'm learning from some of the best in New York and it's been really great so far."

Making their home in Glen Cove, Catapano and his wife, Jenna, have two children: Bella and Mikey.

