

Ravens' Katula In Prime Position

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Baltimore Ravens long snapper Matt Katula is proof you should always listen to your mother.

After snapping as a high school junior at Waukesha Catholic Memorial, Katula disliked the job so much that not only did he tell his coach he didn't want to do it as a senior, he tried to keep his skill on the down-low during the recruiting process. Only his mom, Vicki, saw the value.

"It was something I wanted to keep quiet from college coaches," Katula admitted Thursday. "My mom was the one who said, Let's make sure they know you can snap.' "

But, no, Katula wanted to make it as a position player, so he went to the University of Wisconsin as a defensive end.

And if coach Barry Alvarez hadn't noticed him "messing around" -- Katula's words -- snapping before a practice during his redshirt freshman year, none of this would have happened.

"If I would have stayed at defensive end, I would have been behind Erasmus James," the Brookfield native said, referring to the Minnesota Vikings' first-round draft pick. "I don't know if I'd have gotten much PT. He was pretty good."

Instead, Katula will be snapping for the Ravens Monday night when they play host to the Green Bay Packers.

"Matt's been great," said Baltimore coach Brian Billick, who saw Katula beat out veteran Joe Maese in training camp. "He's been darned near perfect the whole season, which is saying a lot for a rookie."

Katula is the latest in a line of ex-UW long snappers -- Mike Schneck snaps for Buffalo, while Mike Solwold bounced around the league for a few years -- to make it in the NFL.

According to Packers special teams coordinator John Bonamego, Katula came along at just the right time. Unlike a decade ago, when the long snapper was just a backup position player, the position is now valued.

"It has become a specialized position, just like kicker," Bonamego said.

Katula appreciates that change in philosophy and has thrived playing for Ravens special teams coach Gary Zauner, a Milwaukee native who took a shine to him at UW's pro day in March.

"He told me he'd give me a legitimate chance, and it ended up working out," Katula said. "It's really a twist of fate. Thankfully, I picked it up again (at UW). Hopefully, it's

my career for a while."