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## Katula snapping his way to the NFL

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Former Badger long snapper may have a long professional career ahead of him

Four years ago, [Matt Katula](#), having just completed a redshirt season as a true freshman in the fall of 2000, received an ultimatum from University of [Wisconsin](#) offensive line coach [Jim Hueber](#): the Brookfield, Wis., native could either focus on defensive line or long snapper, but he could not try his hand at both.

Katula presciently chose to become a long snapper, a decision that will soon turn into a rather rewarding vocation. Of all the former Badgers who will either hear their name called during this weekend's seven-round NFL Draft, or sign a free agent contract after the draft's conclusion, Katula could very well enjoy the longest NFL career. He is the top rated long snapper available in this year's draft according to NFLDraftScout.com and Great Blue North Draft Report and the No. 3 long snapper according to NFL.com.

"I'm going to give him the credit," Katula said of Hueber's challenge. "Blessing in disguise. At the time I wasn't too happy but now I wouldn't change it for the world."

Katula, who checks in at 6-foot-6 and 280 pounds, quietly played in 48 games for the Badgers the past four seasons, serving as UW's No. 1 long snapper for all but the final three games of the 2001 season, when he was sidelined with a broken arm. In the process, he developed into perhaps UW's most consistent and efficient player on the field, a tactician who was regarded as one of the best his position had to offer nationally as a junior and senior.

Now, Katula is set to earn a paycheck firing a football to punters and holders.

"It's a lot harder than it looks," he said in March, following the Badgers' pro day. "If you want to see somebody try to get down and do it, it's very hard, especially to do it on a consistent basis...."

"It will be a great way to make a living out of college. Something that you could never do doing anything else. Which is amazing."

Katula had a marvelous showing at UW's pro day. In order to test his punt snapping ability, Katula was timed and charted for accuracy as he snapped to a square target that was placed waist high and about six inches to the side, simulating a punter's hand placement. Katula hit the box on 34 out of 35 attempts. His times ranged between .66 and .71 seconds.

"That was exactly what I was looking for," he said. "Low .7s, but if I could get high .6s that'd be great, which is what I did. I was really happy with that."

Such speed and accuracy is the product of years of honing his skills.

"It's progressively gotten faster," Katula said. "I've consistently worked on it every year and I've consistently gotten faster and faster. This is like my peak right now."

When he first began snapping at UW, Katula said his times were in the "high .7s and they were all over the place: at the face, at the shoes. And now they are right around waist high in the high .6s."

At this acknowledgement the affable Katula smiled gregariously.

"Call it a day," he said. "I don't know how much better it can get from there."

Long snappers, interestingly enough, are suddenly at a premium. Katula is expected to have little trouble finding work, despite the fact that there are only 32 first-team long snappers in the NFL.

"I just want to get into a camp and show them what I can do [in the NFL]," he said. "If I have to beat out whoever's guy that is, my personality can do that. I can do that."

As NFL.com's Gil Brandt noted in a draft preview article: "Now deep snappers are making good money because a solid one isn't easy to find.

"In 2002, the [Dallas Cowboys](#) gave unrestricted free agent [Jeff Robinson](#) a \$1.1 million signing bonus. Last year was Robinson's 11th year in the league."

Katula chuckled at the suggestion that he could someday earn \$1 million pay day.

"If I ever get to that point it would be nice but it's nothing I'm expecting at all," he said with a laugh.

The possibility of having a long tenure in the NFL, perhaps the longest of the 2005 Badger draft class, is a bit more tangible.

"It's because I don't get hit as much," Katula said. "And 12 plays a game isn't very much wear and tear on the body."

The NFL will provide more physical challenges for Katula. "At the next level [it is] 250-pound guys who run a 4.4 40 rushing you," he said. "That's something I didn't see in college."

But Katula has the size and athletic ability to hold up in that regard as well. Considered a good coverage man for a long snapper, Katula made 11 tackles in his career and 10 the past three seasons, including a career-high four last fall.

At UW's pro day, Katula recorded a 34-inch vertical jump and 16 reps at 225 pounds on the bench press. He reportedly runs the 40 in 5.1 seconds.

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