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Division 2 Football: Decision to stay pays off for Naps' Nick Capuano

Steve Kendall Division 2 Football

When **Nick Capuano** was in eighth grade at Holy Name Junior-Senior High School, his parents asked him to take the entrance exam to St. John's and consider transferring to that school or Worcester Tech. Capuano did as his parents asked, but even as he sat for the exam, he knew he was not leaving Holy Name.

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Four years later, the decision appears to have been a smart one. Capuano is an outstanding student, leader and player for the Naps. He has learned leadership skills, become stronger physically and mentally and developed a work ethic that will benefit him in all aspects of life. He credits all of that to the coaching staff and his teammates at Holy Name.

"There was no question where I wanted to go to high school," he said. "The coaches started working with me in the weight room when I was in seventh grade. They committed themselves to helping me improve, and I felt I owed it to them to stay here and help give back to the program what they gave to me."

Capuano has certainly done that and more. As a nose guard, he helped the Naps to a Division 1 Super Bowl win two years ago and a Super Bowl appearance last year. This year, which is the Naps' first in the newly aligned Division 2, he leads the team in tackles from his defensive tackle position and plays all the positions on the offensive line as well as fullback.

He epitomizes the essence of Holy Name football: undersized, tough, driven, unselfish and completely committed to team.

At first glance, the 5-foot-7 Capuano is undersized for the line, but his lack of height is actually a benefit. He says his opponents are unable to get under him, which allows him to often beat the much bigger lineman with a bull rush or quick move.

"We are all about team as family here, from the coaches to every player on the team," Capuano said. "The coaches and the upperclassmen taught that to me a long time ago, and I am trying to teach that to the underclassmen now. We are committed to pushing one another to our limits so the team can improve. Everyone has a role."

Capuano pointed to a number of things that have been put into place by coach **Mike Pucko** and his assistants, including the staff's commitment to helping the players learn about conditioning, the effort to help with academics and the college search, the family atmosphere and the team dinners, and the commitment to excellence.

One of Capuano's favorite traditions is the Sunday film sessions. Every Sunday, the team gathers to watch the film of that week's game, reviewing the positive aspects as well as the areas of challenge for the Naps. Often, he said, the coaches are tough, and the expectations and demands for Holy Name players are high.

The sessions are not mandatory, yet nearly every player attends every week. Why? Because at the end of each session, the players get to eat a meal prepared by Pucko. Most times it's pasta, but often it includes baked goods and occasionally a make-your-own ice cream sundae.

"We started it to help build camaraderie, but it didn't hurt that it got kids to show up for film," Pucko said. "It's not easy to sit there and receive criticism, even if it's constructive, so we thought this would be a way to make the time more enjoyable. We all enjoy it, and it really has helped foster the idea of family within our team."

That family-type atmosphere and unselfish attitude is especially important considering the team dresses only 27 players for varsity games and players are asked to understand multiple positions, play most of the game and compete in one of the most physical brands of football in the state. Year in and year out, the Naps are always one of the toughest teams to play because of their physicality, work ethic and determined attitude.

Capuano credits Holy Name with teaching him these attributes, and he hopes they will help him succeed in college next year, where he hopes to play for a Division 3 school in the New England Football Conference.

"Holy Name has taught me so much that it is going to help me with my future," he said. "Staying here was the best decision I have made."

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