



Fueled By Family, Sports & Education

BY JENNA CAPUTO / PHOTOS BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY AND CONTRIBUTED BY JR RICKERT

John “JR” Rickert has been to the Super Bowl weekend events 11 times. He also holds the record as the longest running principal at Niskayuna High School. We may know him during the day as Principal Rickert, but he has another full-time job as the president and owner of JR Sports Enterprises, representing some of America’s most well-known athletes. Both jobs are incredibly important to him, and he puts his full effort and passion into them every day. His success comes down to a strong work ethic that has passed through his family for generations.

Growing up in New Jersey, JR often spent his days—and many nights too—playing pick-up sports with the other neighborhood kids. Sports were an important part of his life early on since his father was a coach at Pennsauken High School for soccer and basketball and later became their Athletic Director. Some of JR’s earliest memories are being with his dad at practices and hanging around with the players. When he turned six, he jumped in himself, playing organized baseball, football, and basketball, attending his first professional game at 8 years old. By high school, he knew he wanted to play college football and strove for an academic and sports scholarship. His coach, major league baseball player Greg Luzinski, worked hard to get JR’s name out to the colleges, and JR ended up with multiple offers.

He decided to accept the President’s Scholarship and alumni grant to St. John Fisher College to study as a double major in Communications and History with a concentration in Pre-Law. Little did he know that his orientation activity on that Friday night would lead to meeting Carol, a senior on the orientation committee. Today they are married with two kids and get a kick out of the photos that featured the two of them that the college used from that event.





Carol with Bradley Cooper on set



With Niskayuna Administrators volunteering at the City Mission



With Travelle Mazion

After finishing his graduate work at St. Rose, JR immediately found a job as an assistant varsity football coach for Niskayuna, and in the following year, took a job as a social studies teacher as well. By 1999, he became the Assistant Principal, and in 2001 became principal, holding the position ever since.

He has a strong sentimental side that has helped him throughout his career. Always rooting for the underdog, JR has a board in his office displaying some of the people that were told they couldn't do something but persevered anyway and went on to greatness. He also keeps track of the number of days he has worked at the school, as well as the number of days he has lived. As of April 1st, he has celebrated 18,529 days alive and 5,497 days in Niskayuna. He's incredibly honored and grateful for the time with his students. "It has been an amazing time for me, and I am so thankful for the many opportunities that I have had in my career," he says. "Although there are always challenging times, I have never had a bad day at Niskayuna High School."

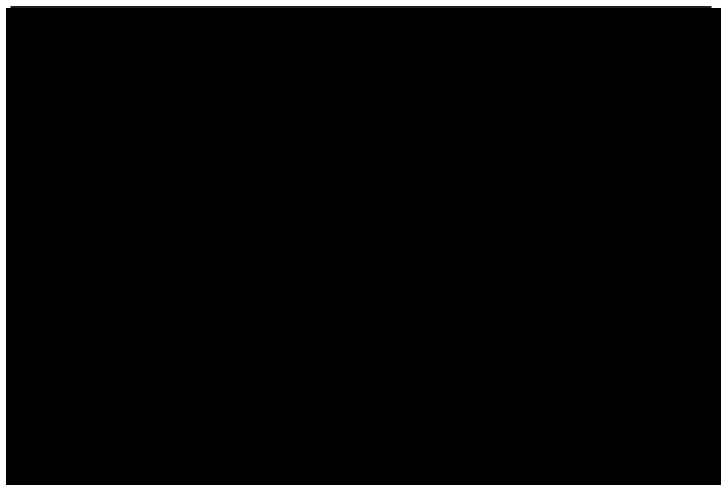
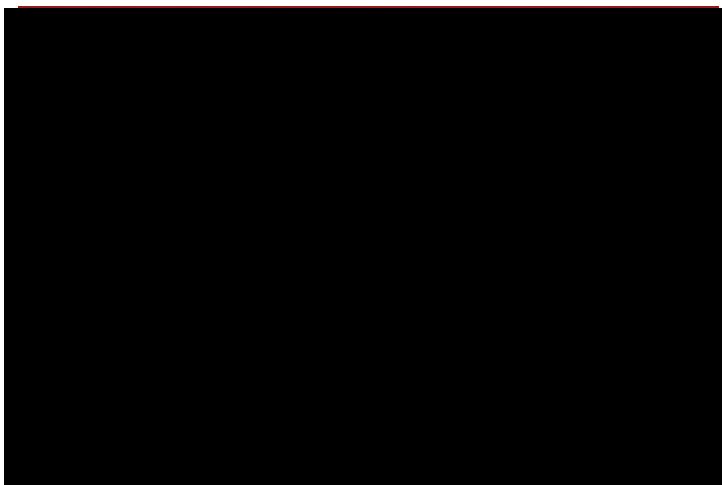
Obviously, the pandemic brought a new level of "challenge" to the table. "A complete high school experience includes the many social elements and co-curricular activities that really shape a student's growth and development," he says. "The loss of these experiences has the potential to limit development on several key levels. I feel that they need to be given opportunities in the future to make up for what each has missed this past year. I am really focusing on giving our seniors from the Class of 2021 the best end-of-year experience that we can. They have been deprived of so many traditional high school experiences, and we want to do whatever we can to recognize them." The students, staff, and parents have all worked hard to put together some memorable events for the senior students, and JR is so grateful for all who have come forward to help. He's also proud of the tremendous job everyone has done to keep their building safe during this unpredictable year.

Every day in the school has brought JR renewed energy as he thrives off the energy of those he works with as well as the students themselves. "It is so refreshing to watch our future take shape in front of me every day," he says. "I have seen so many of our graduates leave Niskayuna and really make some exceptional contributions to the global society. It is amazing just to be able to be a small part of their growth and development. I also enjoy the caring and commitment of our staff. They all work very hard to give our students the best possible learning experiences. I feel so lucky and fortunate to have worked with so many dedicated educators in my career."

As he rose through the ranks in his academic career, JR also continued with his athletics. During his time as a football coach, he worked at several local and regional camps as well and began mentoring some of the athletes. In 1999, he began the framework to help his athletes with their college selection. By 2000, he was helping them secure their professional try-outs, and by the end of 2001—the year he became principal—he started representing them in their transition to the professional world, signing his first NFL player.

Many people told him he needed to give up one of his careers to focus on the other, but he didn't want to do that. He knew he would have to make sacrifices, but both jobs were his passion and defined who he was. "I don't think that I would have been as good of a principal without the sports agent experience, and I would not have been as good of an agent without the principal experience!" he says. He has never regretted that decision. "The thing that I love the most is that every day I have an opportunity to help people in some capacity. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't get a chance to help a student, a teacher, a colleague, a friend, an athlete, or a client. This is really what drives me every day. If I can do something, no matter how big or small it may be to make someone's life better, it gives meaning and purpose to my work. I am really thankful for all of the people that I have been given the chance to meet and work with in both of my careers."

This dual career has also afforded him many unique and memorable experiences, including the chance to attend eight Super Bowl games and getting the opportunity to meet many big names in the business including Terry Bradshaw, Ken Griffey Jr., and Mark Cuban. He attended his first Super Bowl

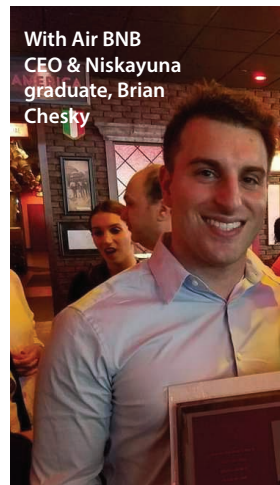




With Tim at a 2019 Super Bowl concert



With Hakeem Nicks at Center for Disabilities telethon

With Air BNB
CEO & Niskayuna
graduate, Brian
Chesky

with his dad in 2005 in Jacksonville, FL to watch his client with the Eagles face the Patriots. He also had the honor of presenting his client, Josh Cribbs of the Cleveland Browns, with a brand-new contract in front of 2,000 Browns fans that was broadcasted across every television station in Cleveland. In 2012, he brought Hakeem Nicks of the NY Giants to Albany to do the Center for Disabilities Services telethon, then one week later, joined him for the Super Bowl in Indianapolis where Nicks had nine catches to win over the Patriots. One of JR's most memorable Super Bowls was in 2017 in Houston, TX, where he watched his client, Dion Lewis, the starting running back of the Patriots, come from behind to beat the Atlanta Falcons. And, one of his favorite memories, attending the Super Bowl in Atlanta with his son, Timothy, in 2019. There are so many other memories as well.

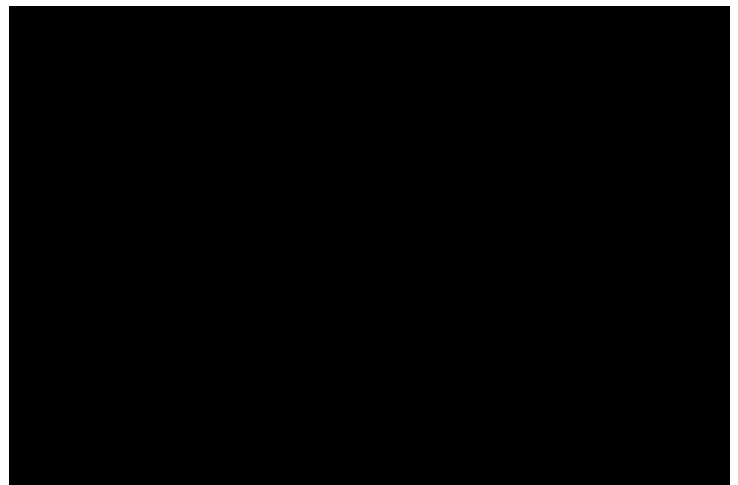
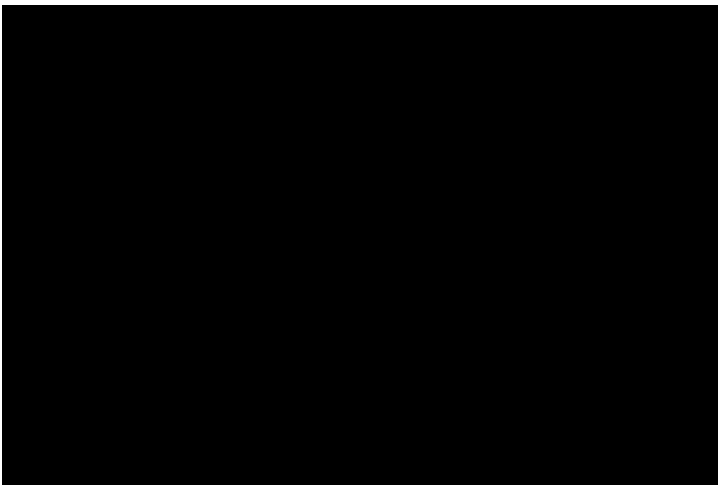
In 2006, JR became a radio personality, starting on a small segment of the Fox Sports Show, "Murphy's Law," then taking on his own one-hour NFL show on Friday evenings called, "Inside Pro Football," where he spoke to national level talent and personalities every week. In 2011-2015, the show moved to ESPN Radio. He also appeared on ESPN Sports Center Live and ESPN's "Outside the Lines."

In addition to his own firm, JR is an officer for his partner Peter Schaffer's firm, Authentic Athletix, based in Denver, CO, where they work together on all of their contracts. Always on the go, JR is the Regional President for the Capital District for the Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association, a representative on the NYS Commissioner of Education's monthly task force, the current president of the Suburban Scholastic Council, a consultant and investor for many businesses around the country, and a mentor and teacher of Sports Law at Sage College, all while volunteering with Carol at St. Kateri Tekakuiha church. JR continues to stay active and works out by lifting weights, running, jump roping, and boxing, in addition to maintaining his baseball collection that he began as a child. He has several fantastic cards including a Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, and Mickey Mantle.

Family is an important aspect of his life too! His son, Tim (20), is taking a year off before returning to college and working full time at Hannaford in the meantime. He often trains with JR, sparring together and practicing



At Cardiac Classic 5k with Tim & Billy





At 2017 Super Bowl



With members of the Niskayuna Girls Track Team

boxing drills. Word has it he's pretty amazing at card tricks and collects guitars, too. William (18) is a senior at Colonie High School, knew all 50 states and their capitals when he was only 4 years old, and loves snakes and reptiles, often dragging the family to events to see them in person. Carol takes care of the family and enjoys playing the piano, working out, and drawing, even though she doesn't have the time to keep up with it as much as she would like. Carol's mom, Anna Palmer, also lives with them, and she makes the most amazing homemade Italian sauce that no one has been able to duplicate. Their Persian cats, Jacques and Jinx, as well as Shelby, their Irish Cream Golden Doodle, and Felix the Gecko lizard round out their family.

JR and Carol had the chance to be movie extras on 2011's *The Place Beyond the Pines* with Bradley Cooper and Ryan Gosling. The movie was looking for vehicles to participate in the funeral procession scene, so JR sent in a picture of their Cadillac Escalade. They were the second car in the procession and stood right near Bradley Cooper while he delivered

the eulogy. "We must have shot the scene about 30 times and it took all day long. After we finished, my wife and I approached Bradley and asked him to take a photo with her. He could not have been friendlier and more accommodating. After a long day of filming, he gladly posed for photos with my wife and chatted with us for a few minutes," says JR.

Normally, the Rickerts travel to Central Park every Thanksgiving to run the 5K Cardiac Classic Race, and they support the local economy as much as possible, visiting many local businesses and restaurants as well as sporting events. After the pandemic, they're looking forward to resuming their yearly trips to the Jersey shore, visiting JR's mom in Naples, FL, and returning to the stadiums to watch the games in person.

Since family is so important to him, JR has enjoyed researching their history and spent five years tracing his roots back as far as he could, which goes back to the 1500s on his father's side. He now knows exactly when his relatives arrived in the country, on what ships, and where. His mother's side is Italian, and it is a bit harder to trace records there, so he has so far only been able to get back to the 1800s. He does, however, have many of their original documents and knows exactly where they are all from in Italy.

He is grateful for that strong work ethic that has been passed down through the generations of his family. His mom started three businesses from scratch, and his dad pushed him hard as a young athlete. "He taught me at a young age that with hard work, you can accomplish a lot. He also attended every single one of my football games as a young athlete and did not miss a single game in 15 seasons of play." JR carries this tradition on, always with a positive attitude and remembering to work through the challenges life may throw at you. While he does plan to slow down during retirement, he is savoring every moment his life and career has thrown at him. "I have really enjoyed this journey, and I have no idea where the destination will take me, but most of all, I am truly thankful to everyone who made all of these experiences so meaningful!"

