

# UPDATED: Piscataway Keeps Pumping Out The Pro's, Karl-Anthony Towns Is The Latest

**Editor's Note:** This article was originally published on June 26. It is now updated with three items:

We added a segment on James Lewis (Class of 1997), who helped lead the University of Miami football program to the 2002 national title.

We added a piece on Brendan Donovan (Class of 2002), who played football for the Chiefs and is now an assistant coach with the Cleveland Browns (look in coaching section).

We also added a piece on Tom Higgins, who did not play at Piscataway, but who is the son of former head football coach Tom Higgins Sr. and brother of current head coach Dan Higgins (look in coaching section). Tom is a long-time coach and Grey Cup champion in the Canadian Football League.

**While there are several high schools in Middlesex County** which do not have one athlete who appeared in a professional sporting event at the highest level, the town of Piscataway keeps pumping them out on a regular basis.

Karl-Anthony Towns, picked as the No. 1 player in the 2015 draft on Thursday by the Minnesota Timberwolves, is the latest professional athlete who calls Piscataway home.



owns with his sister (far left), girlfriend, mother and father



The town of Piscataway can boast of an:

- \* Olympic gold medalist (Asjha Jones).
- \* Two-time National College Women's Basketball Champion (Asjha Jones)
- \* An NBA World Champion (John Celestand)
- \* A Super Bowl Champion (Malcolm Jenkins)
- \* Two National College Football Champions (Mike Alexander and James Lewis)
- \* Two-time, First Team Women's Basketball All-American (Valerie Walker)
- \* The No. 1 pick in the NBA draft (Karl-Anthony Towns)



Malcolm Jenkins and his daughter Elle at The Malcolm

## Jenkins Foundation on Saturday

Although the 6-foot-11, 19-year-old Towns attended St. Joseph of Metuchen, he was born and raised in Piscataway, population 57,000, where he honed his skills as a youngster. His father Karl Towns Sr. coached Piscataway Tech High School for 15 years and was a standout ball player at PHS.

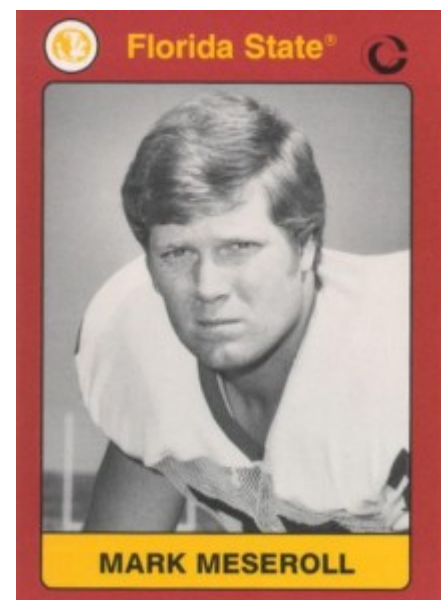
During his publicity tour leading up to the draft, Towns could be found anywhere flipping the channels and while he plugged St. Joseph of Metuchen, he never shied away from saying he was raised in Piscataway.

I came up with the list athletes who appeared in a professional game at the highest level who were residents of Piscataway. All attended Piscataway High with the exception of Towns.

Piscataway High School opened in 1959.

At Piscataway, football is king.

**Mark Meseroll**, who graduated in 1973, was the first NFL player from the town.



Meseroll, 6-5, 270 in his prime, signed with the New Orleans Saints as a free agent lineman out of Florida State in 1978. Meseroll, who also threw the shot and javelin at Piscataway and Fla. State, played in all 16 games with the Saints in 1978

and that was it.

In doing searches on Meseroll, it never said anything about why he never played again, so he had a one-year career in the NFL.

Next up was **Mike Alexander**, PHS Class of 1983.

A 6-3, 195-pound wide receiver, Alexander was on Penn State's unbeaten, national championship team in 1986.

### [ALEXANDER MOURNS SUDDEN DEATH OF HIS FATHER, FROM 1991](#)

An eighth-round pick by the Los Angeles Raiders in 1988, Alexander played in all 16 games for the Raiders in '89. After an injury, Alexander didn't play in 1990. In '91, he played three games with the Buffalo Bills before another injury and then having to deal with the sudden death of his father ended his career.



James Lewis

### **LEWIS MAKES MARK IN NATIONAL TITLE GAME**

**James Lewis**, P-Way Class of 1997, was a key member of the University of Miami football team. As a defensive back, Lewis recorded 59 tackles and three interceptions in his senior year.

Lewis returned an interception 47 yards for a touchdown to help lead Miami to the national championship with a 37-14 victory over Nebraska in the 2002 Rose Bowl.

WATCH LEWIS INT AT 5:35 MARK OF THIS VIDEO:

### THE 2004 FOOTBALL TEAM

The unbeaten Piscataway team of 2004 produced three first-round draft picks in the NFL – **Malcolm Jenkins, Anthony Davis and Kyle Wilson**. A fourth member of the that team, Brandon Renkart, made it to the practice squad with the Colts.

Jenkins (Class of 2005) was drafted No. 14 in 2009 by the Saints out of Ohio State where he won the Jim Thorpe Award for the top defensive back in the nation. The 6-0, 205-pound safety started six seasons with the Saints, winning a Super Bowl ring in his rookie season. He signed as a free agent with the Eagles and will be starting his second season in Philadelphia.



Kyle Wilson

Davis (Class of 2007) was drafted No. 11 by the 49'ers in 2010 out of Rutgers. The 6-5, 320-pound offensive lineman started for all five seasons with San Francisco before he recently announced his early retirement, citing injuries while leaving the door open for a return.



Wilson (Class of 2005) was drafted No. 29 in 2010 by the Jets out of Boise State. The 5-10, 195-pound cornerback played in all 80 games in five seasons with the Jets either as a starter or a situational player. Wilson was signed by the Saints in April.



Anthony Davis (Photo by Brian Bahr/Getty Images)

## ONE MORE IN NFL



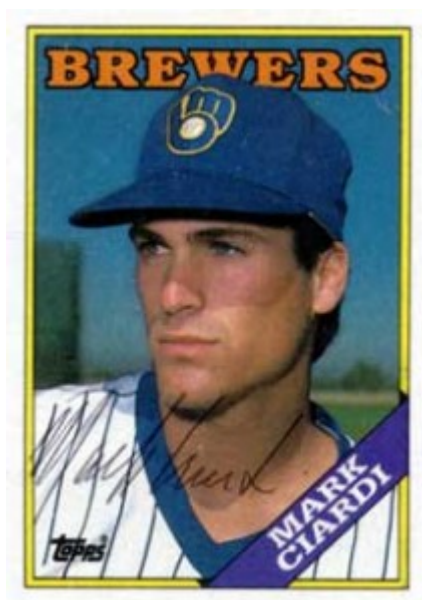
Dwayne Gratz

**Dwayne Gratz** (Class of 2008) was drafted in the third round (No. 64 overall) by the Jaguars in 2013 out of Connecticut.

The 5-11, 200-pound defensive back has been a starter with Jacksonville for two seasons.

**Marvin Booker** (Class of 2008), who played DE/LB at Rutgers, signed a free agent contract with the Buccaneers in 2013 and earned a salary while on the injured reserve the entire season. He has played with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers of the Canadian Football League the last two seasons.

## **BASEBALL**



Piscataway has produced two players who played in the major leagues.

**Mark Ciardi**, Class of 1979, played four games with the Milwaukee Brewers in 1987 as a relief pitcher.

Ciardi is an intriguing story because he went on to become a film producer and actor. He has produced 10 movies, including sports movies *The Rookie*, *Miracle*, *Invincible*, *Secretariat* and *Million Dollar Arm*. He has acted in four movies, including *The Rookie* and *Fever Pitch*.

The Piscataway football field is named after his father Dominic Ciardi, who passed away in 2013. The elder Ciardi served on the Piscataway school board for 26 years.

**Eric Young Jr.** (Class of 2003), who played football and

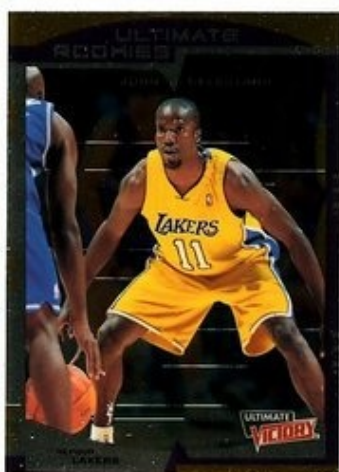


baseball at P-Way, played seven years in the major leagues. Young, who has a career batting average of .278, played for the Rockies (2009-13), the Mets (2013-14) and the Braves in 2015. Young was released on June 5 and is a free agent.

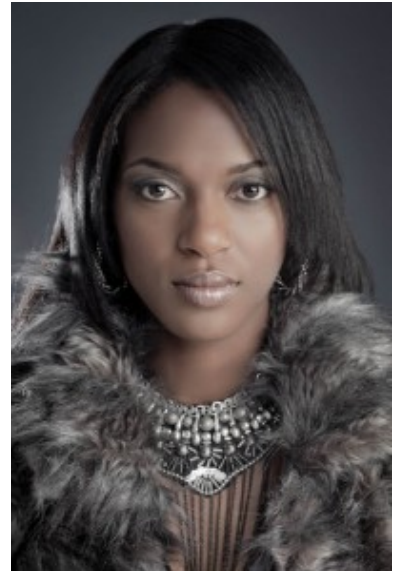


Eric Young Jr.

## **BASKETBALL**



John Celestand



Asjha Jones

**Asjha Jones** (Class of '98), played on two national championship teams at UConn and was on the winning Olympic team for USA in 2012. The leader in points scored at P-Way (2,266) was the No. 4 pick in the 2002 WNBA draft by the

Washington Mystics. She has played for three teams in the WNBA in her 13-year career and is currently playing for the Minnesota Lynx.

**John Celestand** (Class of 1995), was the 30th pick in the NBA draft in 1999 by the Lakers. A shooting guard out of Villanova, Celestand won an NBA championship in his one year with the Lakers. Celestand went on to play six years overseas in Germany, Italy, France and Ukraine.



Brendan Donovan

## **COACHING**

**Brendan Donovan**, P-Way Class of 2002, is in his third season as a college research specialist for the NFL's Cleveland Browns.

A 2006 graduate of Seton Hall, Donovan began his career at Notre Dame (coordinator of quality control) and was there for two years before coaching at Rutgers for one season (recruiting assistant). He then moved to the University of Florida for two seasons (program coordinator one season, director of on-campus recruiting the other) before moving to the NFL.

**Brian Hill**, who once coached the Piscataway boys JV basketball team in the late 1960's, went on to coach in the NBA for 27 years, including the head coach for the Orlando Magic (1993-97), Memphis Grizzlies (1997-99) and the Magic again (2005-07). Hill, who did not attend PHS, last coached in the NBA as an assistant with the Pistons.

**Tom Higgins Sr.** played with the Eagles and the Cardinals in the NFL, but did not attend Piscataway where he coached the football team from 1970-89.

**Tom Higgins** never played at Piscataway, but he is the son of former head coach Tom Higgins Sr. and the brother of current head football coach Dan Higgins.

### [TOM HIGGINS WIKIPEDIA PAGE](#)

Higgins played at Colonia before the family moved to Piscataway. He played for the Buffalo Bills in the NFL for one season before playing in the Canadian Football League for four seasons. Higgins, once the Director of Officiating in the CFL, led the Edmonton Eskimos to the 2003 Grey Cup title as the head coach. He is currently the head coach of the Montreal Alouettes.

### ON THE NFL PRACTICE SQUAD



Steven Miller

There are six former Piscataway Chiefs who made it as far as the practice squad in the NFL, which means they practiced with the team daily and drew a salary, but never played in an NFL game.

**Eric Wainwright**, Class of 1985, signed with the Eagles as a free agent in 1991 after a stellar career as a linebacker with Delaware State. Wainwright was on the practice squad for one year.

**Kerry Ferrell**, Class of 1988, played wide receiver at Syracuse and signed with the Browns as a free agent in 1993. Ferrell



was on the practice squad for one season.

**Jay Kearney**, Class of 1989, was a sixth-round draft pick by the Packers out of West Virginia. The wide receiver played on the Green Bay practice squad in 1994.

**James Lewis**, as profiled earlier, signed as a free agent with the Cleveland Browns in 2002 as a defensive back out of Miami. He played on the practice squad in 2002.



Brandon Renkart

**Brandon Renkart**, Class of 2003 who played multiple positions at Rutgers, signed with the Jets as a free agent linebacker in 2008. Renkart played on practice squads with the Jets, Cardinals, Colts and Colts. Renkart was on the Colts sideline when they lost to the Saints in the 2010 Super Bowl.

**Steven Miller**, Class of 2009, signed with the Lions as a free agent RB after a record-setting career at Appalachian State. Miller played in the pre-season with the Lions the last two seasons and on the practice squad. He is currently a free agent.

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**NOTES:**

**Valerie Walker**, along with Jones, are the two most recognizable names in women's basketball. Walker, however,

graduated from PHS in 1978 and from Cheyney State in 1982 when no professional leagues for women existed.

Walker was a two-time, First Team All-American in 1981 and '82 and was a final cut of the 1984 Olympic team.

There is a plaque hanging in the school with all the professional athletes from PHS and Walker is listed with the tag 'World University Basketball Games' under her name.

Piscataway graduate **Corey Smith** was selected No. 26 by the Cleveland Indians in the 2000 Major League Baseball draft. Smith played with six six different organizations, including four at the AAA level.

Piscataway graduate **J.D. Griggs** signed as a free agent with the Jaguars in 2013 out of Akron, but was released.



Vaslerie Walker in college

