Victor Cruz
Trabajo: NFL Wide Receiver
El Barrio: Paterson, NJ
On a midsummer Monday night, NY Giants wide receiver Victor Cruz, leapt from obscurity to ESPN's Top 10 after he scorched the cross-town rival Jets, for three touchdowns in 31-16 victory during the NFL's preseason opener. LeBron James' decision to tweet Cruz's stellar performance, ignited the rookie as a trending topic across the blogosphere and into the front page and homes of the tri-state area.

By September, the undrafted free agent secured a spot on the Giants roster, having led the preseason in receiving yards with 297 and tied for first in touchdowns with four. While Youtube viewers and the sporting press still admire Cruz's impressive 64-yard, one-handed TD catch, the rookie's focus remains on the game. "I go through plays I screwed up on," the 23-year-old explains. "It's about [paying] attention to detail. Anyone can do just what's asked of them, but it's about going in early and working harder."

The 6-foot-1, 200 pound Paterson, NJ native grew up a Dallas Cowboys' fan, but joined the division rival Giants as a walk-on to their practice squad. Although Cruz still has to prove himself in the regular season, the upstart didn't show any difficulties adjusting to the pros. The standout receiver shined during the preseason, but will have to establish himself on the special teams unit, with a Giants' squad already stacked with talented wide outs- led by Pro Bowler Steve Smith. The adjustment could pose a problem for any newcomer, but according to Cruz's high school coach, Benjie Wimberly, he'll excel in the new role. "Seeing him return punts was like watching a video game," says Wimberly. "He has unbelievable hips and shifts away from tackles so quick."

A local hero, the half Puerto-Rican and African-American star, played cornerback/wide receiver at Paterson Catholic High School. Initially recruited by Rutgers University to play cornerback, Cruz instead accepted a full scholarship to Division I-AA UMass, in 2004. However, due to poor grades his freshman year (1.7 GPA), Cruz had to wait three years before he played his first game. By 2007, the embattled receiver earned his way back – he raised his grades at a local college- and went on to play the best game ever, of any UMass receiver, with 13 catches for 262 yards and two touchdowns. After several looks from NFL scouts and being named an honorable mention All-American his senior year, Cruz went undrafted last April.
And then, came his shining moment at the new Meadowlands stadium in August. Always one to prove doubters wrong, from the classroom to the gridiron, Cruz aims to use his story to

empower the next generation.“I’d like to reach out to kids,” he reveals. “Show them I came up the same way you came up and anybody can get through the bumps and bruises of life to do something great.” – Michael Cohen