

Bellaire's Lance Mehl works out in the garage of his home while waiting out the final weekend before he reports to the New York Jets training base at Hempstead, N. Y. A former Bellaire High and Penn State linebacking star, Mehl will be launching his third season in the National Football League when he arrives in camp on Monday.

(News-Register Photo—Rich Exner)

# Sports

Sunday, J

## Bellaire's Lance Mehl

### Jets' No. 56 finally gaining recog

By RICH GIBSON

Times-Leader Sports Writer

The New York Jets have had their share of flamboyant players... Broadway Joe Namath... receivers Jerome Barkum and Richard Caster and current character, defensive end Mark Gastineau.

Lance Mehl doesn't fit into the above category. In fact, the quiet, down-to-earth native of Bellaire would probably fit in better with the Miami Dolphins "no-name" defense.

Lance has gone through a rather routine (from a public relations standpoint) three-year career with the Jets.

Here's a typical Lance Mehl Sunday afternoon: 1. Arrive at stadium. 2. See Jets' trainer before game. 3. Participate in pre-game warm-up drills. 4. Occasionally be introduced to the

crowd. 5. Go out, play four hard quarters of football (usually leading the team in tackles). 6. Hustle back into the lockerroom. 7. Shower. 8. Get dressed. 9. Retreat to Long Island residence and call it a day.

The week leading to today's Jet-Dolphin AFC Championship clash has been distinctly untypical for the Jets' No. 56. Mehl's two late-game interceptions of Jim Plunkett aeriels saved the day for Walt Michael's "Green Machine" last weekend against the L.A. Raiders and Mehl points out what a difference a day can make.

"I've had more dealings with the media and requests for interviews this week than probably in my three years combined here," he said from his L.I. apartment where he was trying to ward off a cold before departing for sunny Florida.

A glance at Mehl's stats would make one wonder why his name hasn't been recognized to

a wider degree (although he was cited by ABC commentators Frank Gifford and Howard Cosell for excellent play during a Monday Night Football presentation.) He led the Jets in tackles for the second straight year, totaling 99 in the strike-shortened season.

He also picked off two passes, forced a pair of enemy fumbles and recovered a loose ball from his right-linebacker position. Mehl is also the Jets' leading tackler (19) in their playoff wins over the Raiders and Cincinnati Bengals.

With Gastineau's "Wild Man of Borneo" antics coupled with the outstanding play turned in by All-Pro defensive tackle Joe Klecko, Mehl's name hasn't exactly become a household word.

But his heroics against the Raiders may have changed all that. "It was unquestionably my biggest game," said Mehl. "It seems like I must have described the plays (interceptions) a

thousand times.  
The Jets' season play pressure on today. "Our

said. "On the o come with i have to give Todd) time t

A Jet vic Bowl XVII. he has yet t that we're o guess it just! If the Jets could be in t "The Game,

Sunday, January 23, 1983

The Times Leader



# 's Lance Mehl

## No. 56 finally gaining recognition

crowd. 5. Go out, play four hard quarters of football (usually leading the team in tackles). 6. Hustle back into the lockerroom. 7. Shower. 8. Get dressed. 9. Retreat to Long Island residence and call it a day.

The week leading to today's Jet-Dolphin AFC Championship clash has been distinctly untypical for the Jets' No. 56. Mehl's two late-game interceptions of Jim Plunkett averted the day for Walt Michael's "Green Machine," last weekend against the L.A. Raiders and Mehl points out what a difference a day can make.

"I've had more dealings with the media and requests for interviews this week than probably in my three years combined here," he said from his L.I. apartment where he was trying to ward off a cold before departing for sunny Florida.

A glance at Mehl's stats would make one wonder why his name hasn't been recognized to

a wider degree (although he was cited by ABC commentators Frank Gifford and Howard Cosell for excellent play during a Monday Night Football presentation.) He led the Jets in tackles for the second straight year, totaling 99 in the strike-shortened season.

He also picked off two passes, forced a pair of enemy fumbles and recovered a loose ball from his right-linebacker position. Mehl is also the Jets' leading tackler (19) in their playoff wins over the Raiders and Cincinnati Bengals.

With Gastineau's "Wild Man of Borneo" antics coupled with the outstanding play turned in by All-Pro defensive tackle Joe Klecko, Mehl's name hasn't exactly become a household word.

But his heroics against the Raiders may have changed all that. "It was unquestionably my biggest game," said Mehl. "It seems like I must have described the plays (interceptions) a

thousand times."

The Jets fell to Miami two times in regular-season play and Lance feels his club must put pressure on Dolphin quarterback David Woodley today. "Our front four must have a good day," he said.

"On the other hand, they (Miami) generally come with a four-man rush, so we're going to have to give Richard (Jet quarterback Richard Todd) time to set up."

A Jet victory would mean a berth in Super Bowl XVII Jan. 30 at Pasadena, but Lance says he has yet to realize that possibility. "The fact that we're one win away from the Super Bowl...I guess it just hasn't phased me yet," he said.

If the Jets can knock off Miami today, Lance could be in the limelight even more leading up to "The Game" next Sunday.

# Mehl plays role as Jet

By **JOE CARNICELLI**

UPI Executive Sports Editor

LOS ANGELES (UPI) — NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle won't have to face the embarrassing prospect of having the Los Angeles Raiders in the Super Bowl.

The New York Jets took care of that Saturday.

The Jets, getting an exceptional effort from a patchwork defensive unit, stormed from behind in the final period to defeat the Raiders 17-14 and earn a berth in next Sunday's AFC title game.

The Jets, who upset last year's AFC champion — Cincinnati — 44-17 last week will be at the winner of Sunday's San Diego-Miami game next Sunday for the championship and a berth in the Super Bowl on Jan. 30 at nearby Pasadena, Calif.

Trailing 14-10 in the final quarter, Richard Todd launched a 45-yard pass to Wesley Walker to the Raiders' 1. On the next play, Scott Dierking bulled over with 3:45 remaining for the winning score.

The Raiders won a monumental lawsuit against Rozelle and the NFL this year which enabled them to move from Oakland to Los Angeles without approval of the other owners. They finished the strike-shortened season with an 8-1 record — the best in the league — and threatened to further embarrass the NFL by appearing in its showcase game.

But the gritty Jet defense, led by linebacker Lance Mehl, came to the rescue.

Mehl, a former Penn State star, made two critical interceptions in the final 2:49 to keep the Raiders at bay.

His second one, with 1:38 to go, came at the Jets' 26 after the Raiders had moved into position for a game-tying field goal or a possible game-winning touchdown.

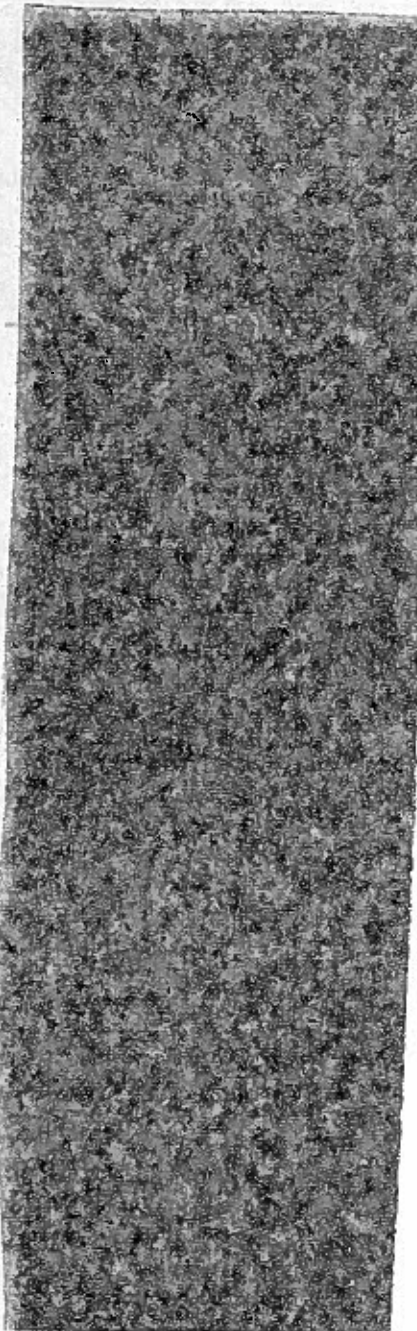
Mehl, a silent-type who has led the Jets in tackles for the past two years, had little to say after his two big defensive efforts.

"We knew they were going to pass and I dropped back and saw Branch going behind the coverage," Mehl explained. "He turned in and I followed him, stepped him and here comes the ball. I was hoping I would catch it but it was kind of low. I went down with it and came up a winner

was Jets owner Leon Hess. Michaels said Davis asked him to go up to the press box immediately.

"That's a sick, rotten way to try and disturb a football team — only a sick person would do that," Michaels said. "And his initials were A.D."

Trailing 10-0 at the half, the Raiders, outhit and outhustled through the opening 30 minutes, stormed ahead on Marcus Allen's 3-yard touchdown run and Jim Plunkett's spectacular 57-yard TD pass to Malcolm



The Jets, getting an exceptional effort from a patchwork defensive unit, stormed from behind in the final period to defeat the Raiders 17-14 and earn a berth in next Sunday's AFC title game.

The Jets, who upset last year's AFC champion — Cincinnati — 44-17 last week will be at the winner of Sunday's San Diego-Miami game next Sunday for the championship and a berth in the Super Bowl on Jan. 30 at nearby Pasadena, Calif.

Trailing 14-10 in the final quarter, Richard Todd launched a 45-yard pass to Wesley Walker to the Raiders' 1. On the next play, Scott Dierking bulled over with 3:45 remaining for the winning score.

The Raiders won a monumental lawsuit against Rozelle and the NFL this year which enabled them to move from Oakland to Los Angeles without approval of the other owners. They finished the strike-shortened season with an 8-1 record — the best in the league — and threatened to further embarrass the NFL by appearing in its showcase game.

But the gritty Jet defense, led by linebacker Lance Mehl, came to the rescue.

Mehl, a former Penn State star, made two critical interceptions in the final 2:49 to keep the Raiders at bay.

His second one, with 1:38 to go, came at the Jets' 26 after the Raiders had moved into position for a game-tying field goal or a possible game-winning touchdown.

Mehl, a silent-type who has led the Jets in tackles for the past two years, had little to say after his two big defensive efforts.

"We knew they were going to pass and I dropped back and saw Branch going behind the coverage," Mehl explained. "He turned in and I followed him, stepped him and here comes the ball. I was hoping I would catch it but it was kind of low. I went down with it and came up a winner."

"In that situation we just had to be ready. If it came your way, you had better be ready for it. If somebody had told me before the game that I would be the difference I'd tell them it was a big joke. Today was the biggest day of all for me — until next week."

Jets Coach Walt Michaels was naturally overjoyed with the victory but he was fuming about what he called a dirty trick by an old enemy, Raider owner Al Davis.

He accused Davis of telephoning the Jets locker room at halftime and pretending he

stormed ahead on Marcus Allen's 3-yard touchdown run and Jim Plunkett's spectacular 57-yard TD pass to Malcolm

# starring s advance

Barnwell.

The Jets appeared to be finished when former Jet Burgess Owens intercepted a pass in the end zone midway through the final quarter but they held on, forced the Raiders to punt and then went 67 yards in six plays for the winning score.

Todd threw 11 yards to Jerome Barkum on a 3rd-and-7 and Freeman McNeil dashed for 6 yards.

Faced with 2nd-and-9 from the 46, Todd hit Walker racing down the left side of the field and the

speedy receiver grabbed the ball despite blanket coverage by Ted Watts.

Mehl then applied the first critical blow with 2:50 left when he intercepted Plunkett's pass and returned it to the Raiders' 27.

The game, played before a crowd of 90,037 at the Memorial Coliseum, was marked by repeated fights among the players and it ended with several of the Jets and Raiders attempting to get at each other.

The Jets took a 7-0 lead after Chris Bahr's 34-yard field goal attempt hit the right upright and bounced away.

Todd ran for 12 yards and hit Walker for 15 to the Raiders' 35. Todd's 7-yard pass to Dierking put the ball on the 25 and then Todd's throw to Lam Jones pushed the ball to the Raiders' 11.

After a holding penalty set New York back to the 21, Todd hit Walker all alone on a post pattern for the score.

In the second period, the Jets pressured Los Angeles into punting and Leahy, whose earlier 47-yard attempt was deflected, connected on a 30-yard field goal for the 10-0 lead with 2:55 to go in the half.

Todd completed 15-of-24 passes for 277 yards. He was sacked four times for 25 yards in losses. Plunkett hit 21-of-33 passes for 266 yards and was sacked twice.

NY Jets	7	3	0	7-17
LA Raiders	0	0	14	0-14
NYJ—Walker 26 pass from Todd (Leahy kick)				
NYJ—FG Leahy 30				
LA—Allen 3 run (Bahr kick)				
LA—Barnwell 57 pass from Plunkett (Bahr kick)				
NYJ—Dierking 1 run (Leahy kick)				
A-90,037				

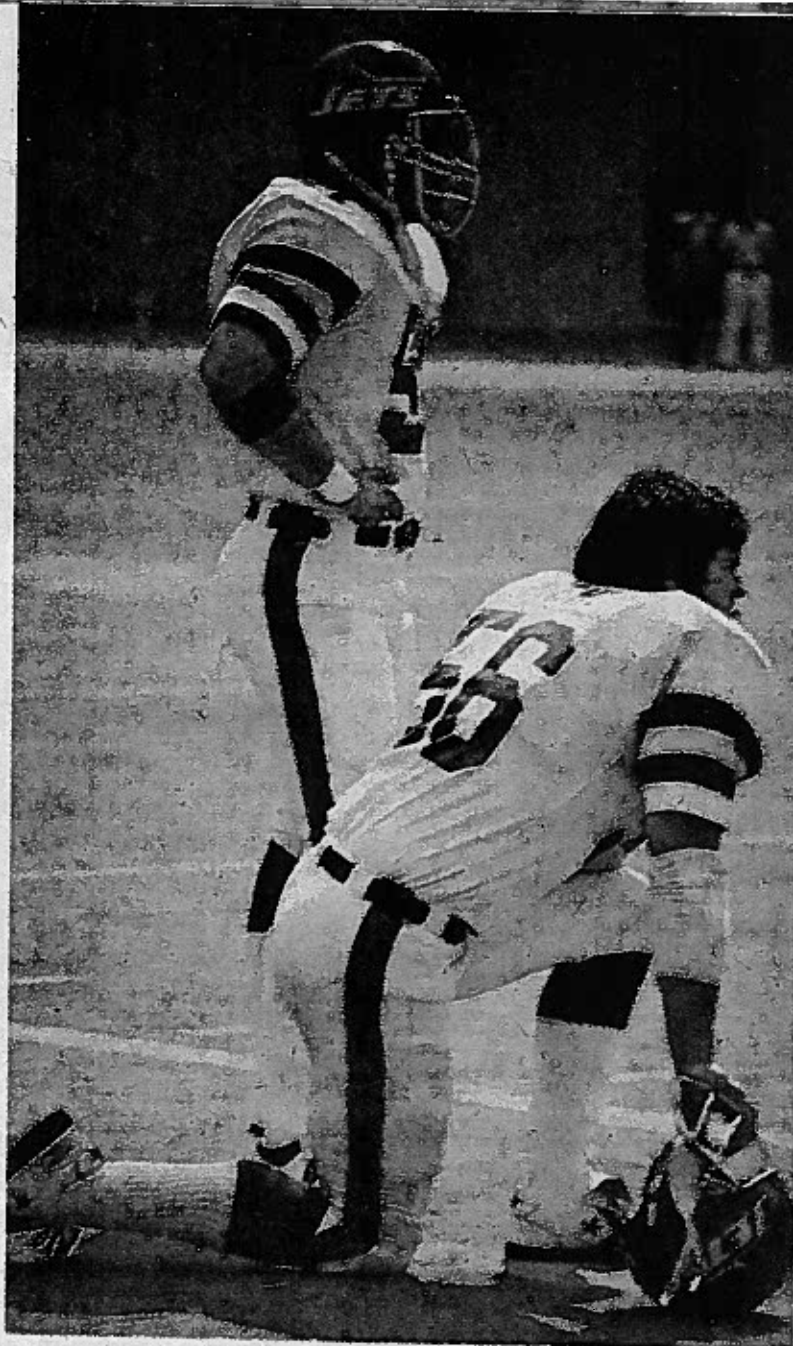
	NYJ	Rai
First downs	21	19
Rushes-yards	34-159	30-93
Passing yards	277	266
Sacks by-yards	2-20	4-25
Return yards	34	049
Passes	15-24-2	21-33-3
Punts	2-31.5	4-41.3
Fumbles-lost	4-3	2-2
Penalties-yards	7-64	5-65
Time of possession	28:19	31:41

#### Individual Leaders

**RUSHING**—NY Jets—McNeil 23-105, Augustyniak 4-22, Todd 5-8, Dierking 2-4. LA Raiders—Allen 15-36, Plunkett 4-18, King 3-16, Montgomery 1-11, Hawkins 3-4, Pruitt 1-4, Barnwell 1-4.

**PASSING**—NY Jets—Todd 15-24-2-277. LA Raiders—Plunkett 21-33-3-266.

**RECEIVING**—NY Jets—Walker 7-169, L. Jones 2-52, Augustyniak 2-18, Barkum 1-11, McNeil 1-11, Shuler 1-9, Dierking 1-7. LA Raiders—Allen 67-37, Branch 5-82, Christensen 5-31, Barnwell 2-63, Hawkins 1-15, Ramsey 1-14, King 1-4.



**BELLAIRE** High product Lance Mehl was relaxing on the sidelines with another Penn State product, Greg Buttle, when Times Leader photographer Joe Lovell snapped this photo earlier in the season. The third-year linebacker will be in the limelight this afternoon as he and his New York Jet mates face the Dolphins in Miami, with a berth in the Super Bowl at stake.

Ex-Bellaire, Penn State Star Will Report to Training Camp Monday

# Mehl Says Jets Are Solidly Behind NFL Players' Union in Contract Talk

By RICH EXNER  
News-Register Sports Writer

New York Jets linebacker Lance Mehl contends the NFL players' union is strong despite attempts by the owners to show otherwise.

"There's no doubt that there are a lot of people that want to play. I want to play. (But) on our team, everybody is in favor of backing the union," said the former Bellaire High and Penn State star, who will report to the Jets' training camp at Hempstead, N.Y., Monday.

The players were recently phoned individually by the *New York Times* and asked their position concerning the strike issues in what union officials feel was a conspiracy by the owners to break up the union.

"The *New York Times* called me, too," said Mehl. "We gave the team our phone numbers in complete confidence that they wouldn't be given out and they were given to the Times).

"It (the survey) bummed the management council out because they were hoping to find a lot of guys were against the strike. It showed well over three quarters of the union was behind the strike. It back-fired on them," remarked the third-year pro.

Mehl also feels the media have lent helping hand in giving the players a bad rap" during negotiations in what he terms "a media blitz used by the management council."

"The press is so biased in this strike. The media have totally used the management council (for information).

"The media haven't gone out and hunted for the normal person. They go for the big names — the Mortons, the Bradshaws, the Lamberts, the wannas. Lynn Swann is not going to go on strike because he's making 280,000 a year, or whatever, and he's got a contract with ABC. ABC doesn't want him to go out on strike ... All you ever hear in the press is who doesn't want to strike."

Some players who originally said they would not strike are now changing their minds.

"(Terry) Bradshaw said that he was going to cross the picket lines," Mehl said. "He recently has come out and said he'll do what the majority does."

"I will say that if we do go out on strike, the guys that do cross the picket lines will probably have it pretty tough when we go back.

"The pension is just totally ridiculous," he said. "If you play your four years — the needed time to get your pension — you should get about \$400 a month when you reach age 60. The average life span of a pro football player is 59 years old. You get beaten up so much that it goes down below the normal. So you're dead a year before you can collect your pension."

Also among the players present demands are guaranteed pay for players once they make a team for the remainder of the year whether they are cut midway through the season or not; a base rookie salary increase from around \$22,000 to \$75,000; and an increased incentive plan that would encourage winning more than the system now in use.

The present setup pays \$3,000 per member of a wild card game winning team, \$5,000 for first round games, \$9,000 for conference championship

games and \$18,000 for the Super Bowl.

"For as much physical abuse as your going to take and for being that late in the season with your body worn down anyway, some guys don't even think it's worth it (especially with the government grabbing half of it)," Mehl said.

The union's proposal would pay a very lucrative \$75,000 to each member of the winning Super Bowl team.

"The people would see a much better game," Mehl contended. "When you're that beat up, \$10,000 is a lot better than three."

Mehl feels that "55 percent is a bargaining point" and that the players may ease up on their demands.

"Right now we're getting around 28 percent of the gross compared to basketball and baseball, which get over 60 percent," he said. "So we just

want a bigger slice of the pie. The owners say they'll give a flat-the-board \$15,000 or \$20,000 raise. That will be good enough. It's just a matter of getting a little bit more of while you're in the game. It's not a long thing.

"They (the owners) made a million (last year). With our contract, they'll make about \$60 million which is down from the eight million that they would make if they kept everything the same."

The union is also calling for a freeze on ticket prices "so the owners won't blame high ticket prices on the players strike," he added.

What would the union's proposal do for Lance Mehl, the starting linebacker in the NFL?

"It would more than double my salary, which is why I'm not arguing against it."

"Why should we stick out our necks and have some 'scab' go out there and cross the lines? That's like (Dan) Fouts. He didn't want to pay any union dues, but he still wanted to collect all the benefits."

The players received a letter in late June giving explicit directions on how to withdraw from the union if they wished to do so.

What the players' union is seeking is 55 percent of the gross revenues of the clubs to pay for salaries, incentives, pensions and insurance.

"I'm for anything that would raise our salaries because there are a lot of things to consider when you're playing football," Mehl said. "First off, your career span is 4.2 years, average. Four years isn't a lot. If you're making \$40,000, that's \$160,000 in four years. Then you start a new life. You have to set up something different. Plus, in those four years, what happens if you get a wicked knee or shoulder injury? You're going to have trouble with that the rest of your life."

Mehl believes that baseball or basketball players have much more of an opportunity to build a savings account and to make business contacts during their careers because their playing days usually last longer.

Mehl hopes to make some business contacts of his own and to invest some money during the next few years, but if an injury would end his career this season, he says his only option would be to teach school.

This point brings up the current pension plan, which Mehl is not happy with either.

Bellaire, Penn State Star Will Report to Training Camp Monday

# Mehl Says Jets Are Solidly Behind Players' Union in Contract Talks

HEXNER  
Sports Writer

Linebacker Lance  
the NFL players'  
despite attempts by  
otherwise.

But that there are a  
want to play. I want  
n our team, every-  
or of backing the  
ormer Bellaire High  
tar, who will report  
training camp at  
Monday.

He recently phoned  
ie *New York Times*  
position concerning  
in what union offi-  
conspiracy by the  
p the union.

The *Times* called me,  
"We gave the team  
s in complete confi-  
ouldn't be given out  
ven to the *Times*).

I bummed the man-  
out because they  
d a lot of guys were  
e. It showed well  
rs of the union was  
e. It back-fired on  
the third-year pro.  
the media have lent  
giving the players a  
ng negotiations in  
media blitz used by  
ouncil."

so biased in this  
I have totally used  
ouncil (for infor-

ven't gone out and  
rml person. They  
es — the Mortons,  
the Lamberts, the  
ann is not going to  
ause he's making  
whatever, and he's  
ABC. ABC doesn't  
ut on strike ... All  
the press is who  
ike."

Who originally said  
ike are now chang-

Law said that he  
s the picket lines,"  
ently has come out  
what the majority

if we do go out on  
that do cross the  
probably have it  
we go back.

"The pension is just totally ridiculous," he said. "If you play your four years — the needed time to get your pension — you should get about \$400 a month when you reach age 60. The average life span of a pro football player is 59 years old. You get beaten up so much that it goes down below the normal. So you're dead a year before you can collect your pension."

Also among the players present demands are guaranteed pay for players once they make a team for the remainder of the year whether they are cut midway through the season or not; a base rookie salary increase from around \$22,000 to \$75,000; and an increased incentive plan that would encourage winning more than the system now in use.

The present setup pays \$3,000 per member of a wild card game winning team, \$5,000 for first round games, \$9,000 for conference championship

games and \$18,000 for the Super Bowl.

"For as much physical abuse as your going to take and for being that late in the season with your body worn down anyway, some guys don't even think it's worth it (especially with the government grabbing half of it)," Mehl said.

The union's proposal would pay a very lucrative \$75,000 to each member of the winning Super Bowl team.

"The people would see a much better game," Mehl contended. "When you're that beat up, \$10,000 is a lot better than three."

Mehl feels that "55 percent is a bargaining point" and that the players may ease up on their demands.

"Right now we're getting around 28 percent of the gross compared to basketball and baseball, which get over 60 percent," he said. "So we just

want a bigger slice of the pie. If the owners say they'll give a flat across-the-board \$15,000 or \$20,000 raise, that will be good enough. It's just the idea of getting a little bit more of the pie while your in the game. It's not a life long thing.

"They (the owners) made about \$4 million (last year). With our contract, they'll make about \$6 million, which is down from the eight or so million that they would make if we kept everything the same."

The union is also calling for a freeze on ticket prices "so the owners won't blame high ticket prices on the players strike," he added.

What would the union's contract proposal do for Lance Mehl, a starting linebacker in the NFL.

"It would more than double my salary, which is why I'm not going to argue against it."

"Why should we stick out our necks and have some 'scab' go out there and cross the lines? That's like (Dan) Fouts. He didn't want to pay any union dues, but he still wanted to collect all the benefits."

The players received a letter in late June giving explicit directions on how to withdraw from the union if they wished to do so.

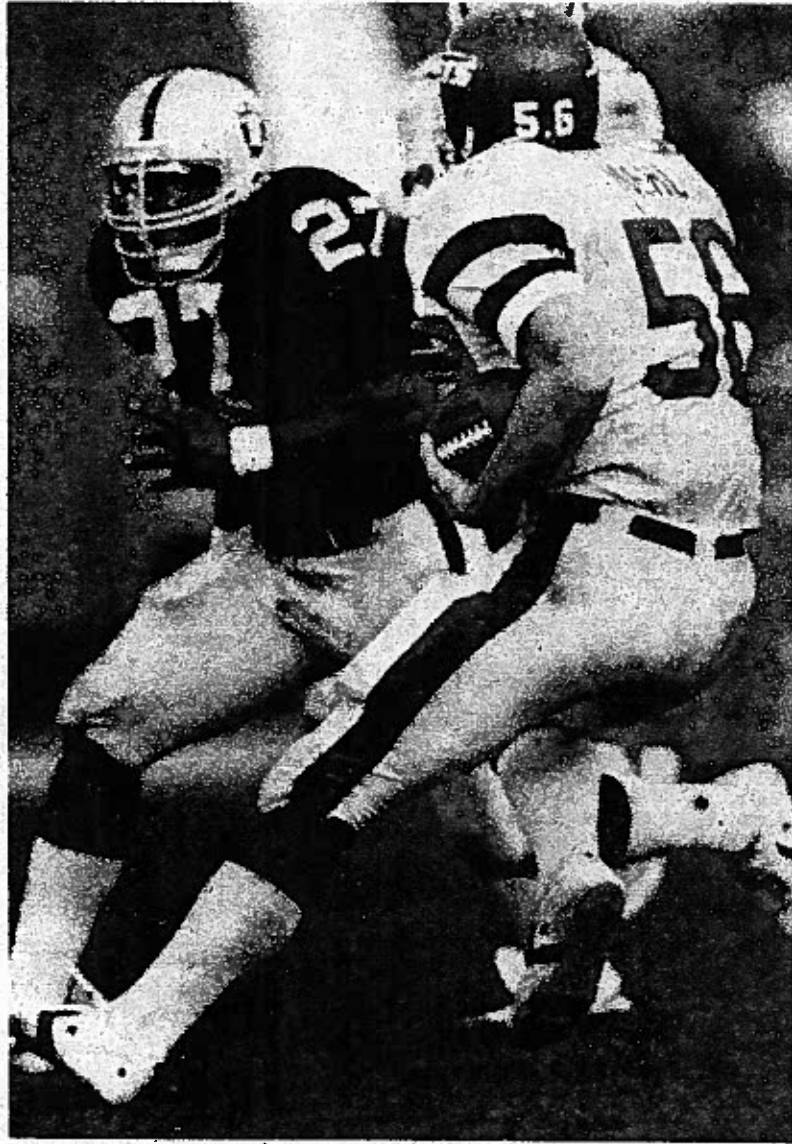
What the players' union is seeking is 55 percent of the gross revenues of the clubs to pay for salaries, incentives, pensions and insurance.

"I'm for anything that would raise our salaries because there are a lot of things to consider when your playing football," Mehl said. "First off, your career span is 4.2 years, average. Four years isn't a lot. If your making \$40,000, that's \$160,000 in four years. Then you start a new life. You have to set up something different. Plus, in those four years, what happens if you get a wicked knee or shoulder injury? You're going to have trouble with that the rest of your life."

Mehl believes that baseball or basketball players have much more of an opportunity to build a savings account and to make business contacts during their careers because their playing days usually last longer.

Mehl hopes to make some business contacts of his own and to invest some money during the next few years, but if an injury would end his career this season, he says his only option would be to teach school.

This point brings up the current pension plan, which Mehl is not happy with either.



*BELLAIRE native Lance Mehl makes his second interception within a three-minute span to smash any last hope of the Los Angeles Raiders in their AFC Super Bowl Tournament game against the New York Jets at the LA Coliseum Saturday. Mehl's second pass theft came with 1:37 left in the game and the Jets ran out the clock to preserve their 17-14 win.*

UPI UNIFAX

# Rivals Jets, Dolphins vie for highest stake

BY JOE CARNICELLI  
UPI Executive Sports Editor

MIAMI (UPI) — The New York Jets and the Miami Dolphins are old enemies — they face each other twice a year — but never before have the stakes been so high.

The Jets face the Dolphins today in the Orange Bowl for the American Conference championship and a berth in next Sunday's Super Bowl at Pasadena, Calif. Each player in today's game will receive \$18,000 and the survivors move on for a possible \$36,000 winner's cut in the Super Bowl.

The Dolphins and the Jets, both in the AFC Eastern Division, faced each other twice this season, with Miami winning both games. The Dolphins ended an eight-game winless streak (0-7-1) against the Jets on opening day with a 45-28 victory at New York and then rallied for a 20-19 victory at Miami last month on Uwe von Schamann's 47-yard field goal with three seconds left.

Von Schamann, however, has become the major question mark for the title game. He broke a small bone in his lower back during the Dolphins' victory over San Diego last week and his long-range effectiveness is in doubt. Miami Coach Don Shula spent a good part of the week checking out kicking candidates among the Dolphins. Rosters are frozen for the playoffs and the Dolphins cannot activate another kicker.

The Jets are listed as 1 1/2 point underdogs but they feel they have history on their side. Fourteen years ago, on Jan. 12, 1969, they went into Super Bowl III on the same Orange Bowl field and pulled off one of the great upsets in football history,

defeating the Baltimore Colts 16-7. The Colts were coached by Don Shula.

No team has lost to another three times in the same season since 1965 when the Colts lost three times to Green Bay. The Colts also were coached that year by Don Shula.

"I can't see any team beating us three times in the same season," said Jets' quarterback Richard Todd. "If the Dolphins beat us, then they deserve to go to the Super Bowl. They have the best defense we've faced this season and they put in all sorts of new things in the last game. But we're on a roll now and I can't see them beating us a third time."

New York, which will be playing its sixth straight road game, was seeded sixth in the eight-team Super Bowl tournament set up this season because of the strike. The Jets advanced to the AFC title game by upsetting Cincinnati, the No. 3 seed, 44-17, and the No. 1 seeded Los Angeles Raiders 17-14.

Miami, which was seeded third, defeated New England and San Diego to qualify for the title game.

The Jets have shown perhaps the best balanced offense in the NFL this season. Second-year back Freeman McNeil led the NFL in rushing with 786 yards and has put together 202 and 102 yards performances in the Jets' playoff victories. Todd was the No. 3 ranked passer in the AFC and he has excellent receivers in Wesley Walker, Lam Jones and running back Bruce Harper.

Defensively, end Mark Gastineau is the top pass rusher and Joe Klecko, the AFC Defensive Player of the Year in 1981, is back after serious knee surgery in September. Linebacker Lance Mehl, who

had two interceptions in the final three minutes to clinch the victory over the Raiders last Saturday, is the Jets' leading tackler and Darrol Ray and Bobby Jackson are the top defensive backs.

Miami quarterback David Woodley, who has been pulled several times this season for Don Strock, has been superb in the playoffs. Tony Nathan, an enigma all season, suddenly has emerged as both a running and receiving threat in the playoffs.

# Jets' linebackers: the All-Pro nobody knows

By Rachel Shuster  
USA TODAY

HEMPSTEAD, N.Y. — The National Football League's no-name defense of the 1970's belonged to the Miami Dolphins.

Now it's no-name linebacking that is carrying the New York Jets into the American Football Conference championship Sunday against the Dolphins.

Kickoff is set for 1 p.m. EST. Television (NBC) coverage begins at 12:30 p.m.

"I think we have a bunch of All-Pro linebackers back there, but unfortunately, they don't get as much publicity as we do," said defensive end Mark Gastineau, a member of the Sack Exchange. "But (Gregg) Buttle, (Stan) Blinka and (Lance) Mehl are some of the best backers in the league. It's nice to know the linebackers are supporting you, so you can go about your job without concern."

Buttle, Blinka and Mehl —

with only 14 years experience among them — are a big reason the Jets held Cincinnati running back Pete Johnson to 26 yards two weeks ago and Los Angeles Raiders All-Pro Marcus Allen to 36 yards last Saturday.

The threesome gives New York quickness and mobility in front of an even younger secondary.

"I think the closest unit going on this team is the linebackers," said Buttle, the seven-year man out of Penn State who plays the left side. "I know what Stan Blinka's going to do, and Lance Mehl knows what I'm going to do."

"Most of the time we're all low-key. I know I'm not in it anymore to be All-Pro. I'm in it for the chance we have this weekend."

Mehl, who plays the right side, has attracted more attention this week because of his two interceptions of Jim Plunkett in the Jets' 17-14 victory against the Raiders.

Another model off Joe Patermo's production line at Penn State, Mehl has lived up to Jets coach Walt Michaels' preseason predictions.

"How many times have I told you people, Lance Mehl is an All-Pro linebacker. But they pick the blitzers for All-Pro," Michaels said. "The first thing I liked about him was he worked in the coal mines (of Ohio for three summers). I'm sorry, I can't help it. I gotta like those people."

Dolphins coach Don Shula likes him, too.

"I like all the Jets' linebackers," Shula said. "I have a lot of respect for Buttle. He's one of the very intelligent players in the league. Blinka's really come on strong at middle linebacker."

"And, not many people know about Lance Mehl on the outside. But our coaches are aware of him. He made some awfully big plays last week, which says a lot about his overall athletic ability."

This week Mehl and company will face a much more difficult target.

Dolphins quarterback David Woodley can pass and run, but it is his increasing confidence that worries the linebackers.

"No question about it, Woodley is their No. 1 now," Mehl says.

Buttle's job will be keying on one of Woodley's favorite targets, Tommy Vigorito.

"Vigorito has 4.5 speed and (Tony) Nathan is about 4.6. So either way, my work's cut out for me," Buttle says.

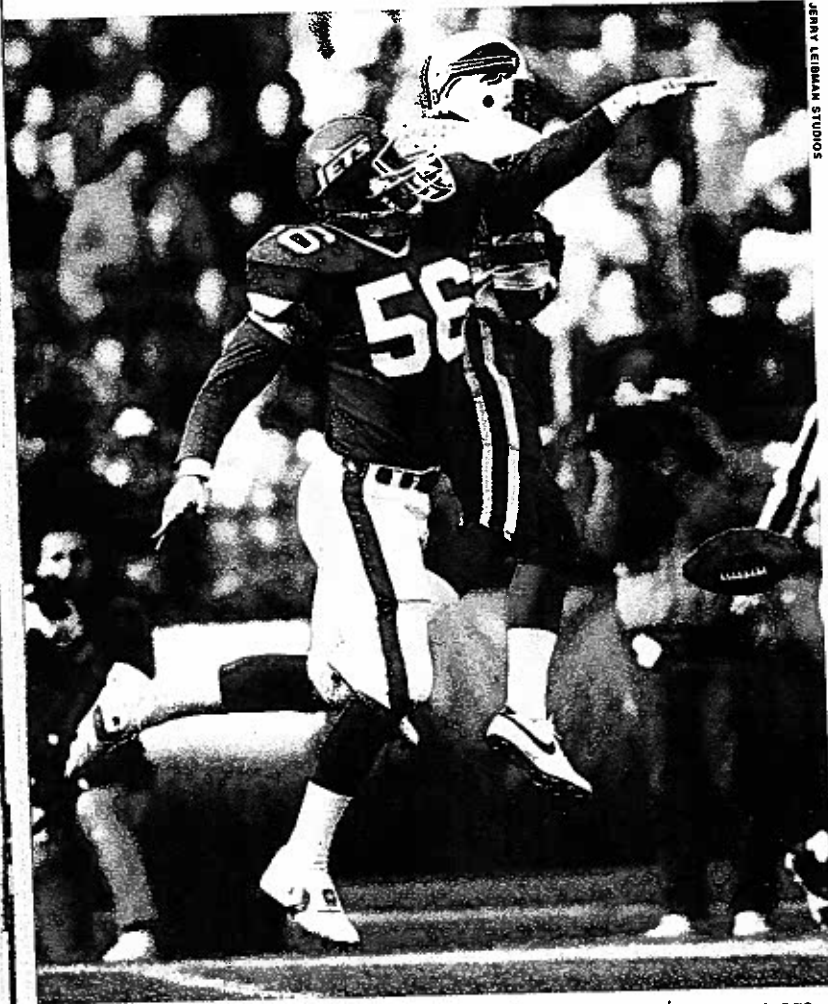
"It's going to be even tougher, because Woodley has improved his passing game in the last few weeks. He's picking out the right receivers now and controlling the football as their offensive leader."

"It's fortunate we have the big horses up front to give him a pass rush," Buttle said with a smile. "Along with some very good linebackers."



AP  
MEHL: Buried the Raiders with two interceptions.

## OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS *continued*



*Mehl is an expert at the technique game—and pass coverage.*

uh, it's not going to be as a stand-up linebacker. You've got to drop down to a three-point stance and beat a 280-pound tackle. And, oh yes, you'll have to be smart, and instinctive, too. You'll have to read on the move and make instant decisions, and . . .

And they've done it. They've done it all, in a manner exceeding those desperate coaches' wildest hopes. They've emerged as the flamboyant, dazzling superstars of the game, the true superstars of history, based on all-around football skill. No position has so many great players.

What's that you say? The real stars are the guys with the ball, the ones who throw it or catch it or run with it? Or possibly the cornerbacks who have to cover those fancy receivers? We don't buy any of that, for the simple reason that those people can be deficient in every area of the game except one and still be successful. So what if the great thrower can't run, or the great runner can't block or catch a pass, or the great deep receiver won't go over the middle or hit anybody? So what if the cornerback skilled at man-to-man coverage is a patsy against the run? They can still make the Pro Bowl. But the outside linebacker with only one skill won't play regularly (although he might find a niche in a specialized situation, such as the nickel defense), because an opponent's offense will quickly zero in on him and make him its

target. There are too many ways an offense can hurt him. Every player except the quarterback takes a crack at him.

Tight ends and running backs are his natural enemies. Tackles, sometimes guards, pick him up when he's rushing. Guards and centers get a shot at him when he's playing inside in nickel or dime defenses, as the Redskins' Rich Milot does. Wide receivers try to prove their manhood against him, cracking down from the blind side on sweeps. Last year a wild-eyed Miami rookie wideout named Fernanza Burgess cracked the Raiders' Jack Squirek's jaw with his helmet and put him out for a month and a half.

"An outside linebacker," says Art Rooney Jr., the Steelers' personnel chief, "is like a great gymnast in the Olympics, except that when he comes out of his floor exercises someone's gonna punch him in the teeth. What I'm saying is, they've got to be skilled athletes but tough, too."

They create an unforgettable set of images—the Giants' Lawrence Taylor or the Patriots' Andre Tippett blasting over an offensive tackle on sheer strength; the Steelers' Mike

*The Rams' Mel Owens (58) is a 1981 first-round draft choice who*





Lance Mehl, Jets—Exceptionally smart, technically sound, reads the QB better than anyone. Off year in '84 because of ankle injury and unsettled nature of personnel around him. Non-blitzer in Jets' scheme, hence no Pro Bowls in past, but that might change under new defensive coach Bud Carson.

Otis Wilson, Bears—On the fringes for years. Finally tuned in to Buddy Ryan's defenses and had success. One of the best when under control. When out of control will make the big play, the big mistake.

#### LONG AND MERITORIOUS SERVICE

Matt Blair, Vikings—Exceptional LB for years, finally showed some mileage in '84. Injury problems, system, slight loss of speed, etc. Bud Grant will bring him back to life.

Brad Van Pelt, Raiders—Smart and effective strongside LB whose speed failed him in '84. Height (6' 5") still makes him effective.

Bob Brazile, Oilers—An enigma through the years. Godzilla one series, invisible the next. Smart player. Always had

speed. Can still cover. Not quite as aggressive as he once was.

Reggie Williams, Bengals—Speed, explosion, brains. Undersized at six feet, 228, he tends to wear down during the course of a season.

Woodrow Lowe, Chargers—Opponents always graded him higher than his own team did. Underrated career. Still quick and sound and a sure tackler.

Bob Brudzinski, Dolphins—Steady force despite team's LB confusion last year. Respected greatly by opponents. Plays better close to the line.

#### ON THE FRINGES OF GREATNESS

Al Harris, Bears—Unsung hero last year. Coverage ability shocked some people. Anthony Dickerson, Cowboys—Strange player. Breathtaking speed but never has put it all together. Johnnie Cooks, Colts—Bounced around from ILB to DE, finally settling at OLB, his natural spot. Will come on in '85. Charles Bowser, Dolphins—Fastest outside rusher in NFL. If you can't stop him, goodbye. Bruce Scholtz, Seahawks—Tall (6' 6") and imposing. Specializes in stuffing tight ends.

#### MOST UNDERRATED

Garry Cobb and Jimmy Williams, Lions; John Anderson, Packers; Joel Williams, Eagles; Rich Milot, Redskins; Al Richardson, Falcons.

Lawrence Taylor is the epitome of the modern-era, big-play linebacker. Unstructured, maybe, but how do you structure a hurricane? The first thing you notice is the power, the ferocious hitting ability generated by a 243-pound man running at 4.58 speed. "He plays the game in a bad mood," George Young says, "and loves to play."

It is November 1983, Giants vs. Redskins. The Skins are on their way to the Super Bowl, the Giants are on the road to 3-12-1. It is early in the second quarter and the Giants already are down 10 points in a game they will lose 33-17. Joe Theismann is back to pass and Taylor is blitzing from the right side. Joe Jacoby, the 300-pound tackle, slides over to block him. Teams learned long ago that you don't try to pick up Taylor with a back, the matchup in the old days. You give him one of the big boys, a guard or tackle, with a tight end or back to help out. Taylor grabs Jacoby by the shoulder pads and throws him. He flushes Theismann out of the pocket and the quarterback is off and running. George Starke, the 260-pound right tackle, peels back to pick up Taylor, who knocks him to the ground without breaking stride. Taylor catches Theismann 15 yards downfield. That's 560 pounds of linemen he has disposed of and a 4.6 quarterback he has run down. It's a play no human being in pads and cleats should be able to make.

It's frightening to think of what would happen if Taylor ever put it all together, if he combined the diagnostic ability of a Jack Ham or Ted Hendricks with his other abilities. The Competition Committee would probably devise a handicap system, packing him with weights like a racehorse.

His coach, Bill Parcells, has schemes made to order that let Taylor take a running start so he can crash in from the right side. "When he came up in '81," Young says, "his play became the stereotype for that position, especially on the

*continued*

# Jets' Mehl receives All-AFC selection

NEW YORK (UPI) — Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino overcame the stigma surrounding his holdout early this season to earn his third straight selection to the UPI All-AFC team.

Marino, who left the Dolphins training camp over a contract dispute, came back from a shaky start to lead the NFL with 336 completions, 4,137 yards and 30 touchdowns in 567 attempts. He received 23 votes in a close race against San Diego's Dan Fouts, who finished second with 20 votes.

The West champion Los Angeles Raiders placed four players on the team, including unanimous selection Marcus Allen.

Allen, the NFL rushing leader, was the only unanimous selection on the AFC All-Star team. He received all 56 votes cast by four sports writers in each conference city.

Allen is joined by Raiders' tight end Todd Christensen on offense while cornerback Mike Haynes was selected along with Howie Long on defense. Long received votes on 54 of the 56 ballots.

Miami, the New York Jets and Denver each had three players on the first-team. Marino, a first-team pick in each of his three NFL seasons, is joined by Miami center Dwight Stephenson and guard Roy Foster on of-

fense.

New York's Freeman McNeil was selected alongside Allen in the backfield for the second straight year. Allen ran for 1,759 yards and 11 touchdowns in 380 carries and McNeil gained 1,131 yards on 294 carries.

Seattle's Steve Largent, a 10-year veteran, and second-year man Louis Lipps of the Pittsburgh Steelers are the wide receivers. Largent caught 79 passes for a league-high 1,287 yards and Lipps had 59 receptions for 1,134 yards and 12 TDs. Tight end Christensen caught 82 passes for 987 yards.

Completing the offensive line are New England guard John Hannah and tackles Anthony Munoz of Cincinnati and Chris Hinton of Indianapolis. Pittsburgh's Gary Anderson, who kicked 33 field goals and led the AFC with 139 points, was the kicker.

All three of Denver's selections are on defense. Rulon Jones is the end opposite Long, and Broncos linebacker Karl Mecklenburg and cornerback Louis Wright were selected.

Nose tackle Joe Klecko of the Jets completes the defensive line, and teammate Lance Mehl is the other inside linebacker. The outside linebackers are Andre Tippett of New England and Chip Banks at Cleveland.

Seattle's Kenny Easley and Deron Cherry of Kansas City are the safeties, and Indianapo-

lis' Rohn Stark is the punter. Stark averaged 45.9 yards per punt.

Munoz, Hannah and Stephenson are other offensive first-team repeaters from 1984. Repeating on defense are Long, Haynes, Cherry and Easley.

NEW YORK (UPI) — The United Press International 1985 American Conference All-Star team (voting by 56 writers, four from each AFC city, in parentheses):

#### First Team

##### Offense

Wide receivers—Steve Largent, Seattle (47); Louis Lipps, Pittsburgh (36)

Tight end—Todd Christensen, Los Angeles (42)

Tackles—Anthony Munoz, Cincinnati (47); Chris Hinton, Indianapolis (23)

Guards—John Hannah, New England (42); Roy Foster, Miami (22)

Center—Dwight Stephenson, Miami (48)

Quarterback—Dan Marino, Miami (23)

Running backs—Marcus Allen, Los Angeles (56); Freeman McNeil, New York (46)

Kicker—Gary Anderson, Pittsburgh (27)

##### Defense

Ends—Howie Long, Los Angeles (54); Rulon Jones, Denver (25)

Nose tackle—Joe Klecko, New York (35)

Outside linebackers—Andre Tippett, New England (53); Chip Banks, Cleveland (38)

Inside linebackers—Karl Mecklenburg, Denver (35); Lance Mehl, New York (30)

Cornerbacks—Mike Haynes, Los Angeles (39); Louis Wright, Denver (33)

Safeties—Kenny Easley, Seattle (47); Deron Cherry, Kansas City (39)

Punter—Rohn Stark, Indianapolis (26)

#### Second Team

##### Offense

Wide receivers—Mark Clayton, Miami (9); Cris Collinsworth, Cincinnati (9)

Tight end—Ozzie Newsome, Cleveland (14)

Tackles—Brain Holloway, New England (11); Jim Lachey, San Diego (11)

Guards—Mike Munchak, Houston (21); Dan Alexander, New York (8)

Center—Mike Webster, Pittsburgh (10)

Quarterback—Dan Fouts, San Diego (20)

Running backs—Lionel James, San Diego (9); Curt Warner, Seattle (1)

Kicker—Nick Lowery, Kansas City (19)

##### Defense

Ends—Mark Gastineau, New York (22); Jacob Green, Seattle (10)

Tackle—Bob Golic, Cleveland (13)

Outside linebackers—Mike Merriweather, New England (14); Rod Martin, Los Angeles (3)

Inside linebackers—Steve Nelson, New England (21); Matt Millen, Los Angeles (14)

Cornerbacks—Raymond Clayborn, New England (16); Dave Brown, Seattle (9)

Safeties—Fred Marion, New England (13); Dennis Smith, Denver (13)

Punter—Regie Roby, Miami (12)

# Painful knee injuries force Jets' Mehl to call it quits

By RICH GIBSON

Times-Leader Sports Writer

It was a painful, yet necessary decision for Bellaire's Lance Mehl.

The former Big Reds' standout athlete, who went on to star at Penn State University before enjoying all-pro status with the New York Jets, announced his retirement from professional football Saturday afternoon.

Sidelined by injuries to both knees the past two seasons, Mehl told *The Times-Leader* the prognosis was not favorable.

"I made the decision based on the fact the knee was not responding the way we had hoped it would," said Mehl from his Hempstead, Long Island residence.

"I played golf last Tuesday in the Marty Lyons Celebrity Tournament and found it difficult to get around on it at times. I just said to myself, 'The time (to make the announcement) is now.'"

Mehl, who graduated from Bellaire High in 1976, went on to star for Coach Joe Paterno at Penn State, where he became another in a long line of standout linebackers for the Nittany Lions.

During his collegiate career, Penn State made three Bowl appearances (Fiesta, Sugar, Liberty). He also participated in the 1980 Hula Bowl all-star game.

A third-round draft pick in 1980, Mehl suffered an injury to his right knee in October 1986. He underwent reconstructive surgery and returned in November of 1987.

During the Jets' third game last fall, Mehl hurt his left knee in Joe Robbie Stadium against the Miami Dolphins, forcing him to miss the remainder of the season.

Mehl had been undergoing rehabilitation, but he told the Jets he was still suffering pain in both knees.

"I couldn't get it (knee) to stop hurting," Mehl said. "Sure, it's very disappointing, but this is part of the reality of playing pro sports."

Mehl led all linebackers in the NFL in interceptions in 1985 and made the Pro Bowl. In the 1982 playoffs against the Los Angeles Raiders he intercepted two passes in the final three minutes to help preserve a 14-10 victory.

Mehl said he is uncertain about his future. "I

really haven't been able to sit down and reflect too much," he said. "The doctors may have to re-scope (arthroscopic surgery) the knee. Right now, I can only sit back and see what happens."

Lance said he would not rule out the possibility of a coaching position.

Mehl and his wife, Linda, are the parents of three children: Lance Jr., 7; Luke, 5; and Logan, 3.

Lance is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mehl of Bellaire.



Jets' All-Pro Lance Mehl