Daily **Life**

Joe La Puma talks career evolution and consistency



Joe La Puma speaks to students during a journalism class in Herbst Hall on Feb. 19. La Puma is known as the host of Complex's "Sneaker Shopping" where he interviews athletes and entertainers. PHOTO BY OLIVIA DICKSON, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS



Joe La Puma poses next to Kim Kardashian. La Puma is known as the host of Complex's "Sneaker Shopping" where he interviews athletes and entertainers. PHOTO COURTESY OF @JLP ON INSTAGRAM

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Content creator and University of Connecticut Alum Joe La Puma came to UConn yesterday to talk about the evolution of his career and give advice to young journalism students.

La Puma is the creator and host of the YouTube show "Sneaker Shopping," which has received over 1 billion views. His interviews have ranged from pop culture icons like Kim Kardashian to political figures like Kamala Harris. He is also the content strategy director for youth culture website Complex.

LaPuma, who graduated from UConn in 2005, spoke to Professor Mike Stanton's Sports Reporting class, with others from the journalism department also in attendance.

"We always talk to you as teachers that you're building the bridge to the future of journalism, which is constantly being reinvented," Stanton said. "Joe's show on YouTube, I think YouTube just started the year [he] graduated from UConn. So journalism today is about storytelling, the eternal truth, but it's also about reinventing yourself."

La Puma talked about the ways that he went about reinventing himself early in his career. While at UConn, he wrote about pop culture, fashion and did album reviews for The Daily Campus. After graduating, La Puma eventually found an internship with Complex magazine, which he had begun reading while in college.

"I remember going into the city, and I go into the interview and there's a stack of resumes," La Puma said. "They weren't hiding how competitive it was going to be."

Though La Puma didn't expect to land the internship, he soon found himself commuting by train twice a week to his unpaid gig with Complex. He was also working 50 hours a week as the manager of a shoe store to pay his bills.

"I loved it," La Puma said.

After a year and a half, La Puma was hired full time to work on their website, which Complex felt was "going to be a big thing," La Puma said.

"I didn't tell them this," La Puma said. "I was like, 'I really wish I could get hired for the magazine,' but anything to get my foot in the door and leave the sneaker store."

La Puma eventually received that chance when he got to fill in for an interview with Tracy Morgan and Christopher Mintz-Plasse.

"I got Perez Hilton quote of the day," La Puma said. "Perez Hilton was like TMZ, the only game in town. You got on Perez Hilton, it was getting like a full post on TMZ now."

La Puma went on to pen 21 cover stories in print, the most anyone has done for Complex, he said. Though he was initially given a goal of 3,000 unique viewers per day on the website so that Complex could sell ads, he helped to build the audience to tens of millions of monthly visitors. The next step in his evolution was video.

"The publishing industry kind of is like, 'yeah, the online thing is cool, but now people want to do video,'" La Puma said. "It's like, okay, so we went from print to online and now we have to figure out video."

One of La Puma's early videos of himself sneaker shopping with rapper Jim Jones was eventually adapted into "Sneaker Shopping."

"There's old episodes online and I'm just standing there hosting and the celebrity's talking and I'm not," La Puma said. "I had no formal training. I'm just like a statue. And now I'm a lot more jumpier."

The series, which now has over 300 episodes, features celebrities appealing to all sides of pop culture. La Puma said that he pushes back on the notion that you have to be a sneakerhead to fit in on his show.

"I could do episodes with everyone in here, 100%," La Puma said. "We can get eight to 10 minutes on YouTube. Trust me, just by asking, 'do you remember your first pair? What was the worst pair you had? What is your current rotation at college? It's snowing out. Do you wear [Timberland boots]? Do you wear Uggs?' I can get eight to 10 minutes, no matter who it is."

For La Puma, the takeaway from his journey is the consistency that was required for him to get to where he is today.

"When I walked into the dining halls and I saw someone reading the first article I did, it was just such a rewarding feeling that I wanted to chase over and over again," La Puma said in an interview following the talk. "It's still with my show that I want to chase people consuming content. It's just a feeling that, to this day, I want to chase, and it stems from the passion of loving what I'm doing, having some sort of audience react to it and have a feeling about it and then just being consistent."

comic by Jason J. Sampson, contributing artist/The Daily Campus

