

# Antonio Cromartie, father of 14, tackles full-time dad duties on new reality show

The former Chargers, Jets and Colts corner opens up on life beyond the game -- with lots of kids

by [Cody Benjamin](#)

Antonio Cromartie knows what you're thinking.

The former NFL cornerback -- a first-round draft pick in 2006, the league's interception leader a year later and a Pro Bowler in three others -- isn't known just for his 11-year football career. He's also known, if not mostly known, for his 14 children. (That's right. Fourteen.) And more often than not, talk of his super-sized family, at least in the NFL community, comes back to the way he recited -- or attempted to recite -- his kids' names during a 2010 edition of HBO's "Hard Knocks."

A handsomely paid starter for the New York Jets with "just" eight kids at the time, Cromartie was asked about his children in a now-infamous clip, in which Yahoo Sports said the all-star was "laboring to remember the names of" his offspring.

Since then, six more kids have arrived, and with them, an annual onslaught of jokes about the cornerback's fertility. With every addition to the Cromartie household, the NFL's ultimate reproducer knows full well what comes to most people's minds -- that fateful interview and the air of irresponsibility it may have carried.

Just over a year after playing his last NFL snap with the Indianapolis Colts, the 33-year-old Cromartie is now a full-time, stay-at-home dad. He's a veteran with a new role on a new team. And he's returning to TV, the birthplace of some of those fatherly misconceptions, to tackle that role -- and maybe even some of those misconceptions.

"The Cromarties" premieres Thursday on USA Network, and it's as much the doing of Cromartie's wife, Terricka, as it is the former All-Pro cover man. Its comedy is mostly drawn from the couple's six children -- Jerzie, Jurize, Jagger, Jhett and twins J'Adore and Jynx. (Cromartie's other kids are part of a blended family). It mainly opens, however, not only as "a comedic half-hour docu-series" but as a peek at the Antonio Cromartie never seen in that snippet of "Hard Knocks," not to mention the decade he spent shadowing NFL wide receivers.

It is, as Antonio and Terricka told CBSSports.com, a platform to prove the Cromartie name is much less indicative of a dad meme as it is the name of a real family.

"From the beginning, everybody knows Antonio, everybody knows Antonio has kids, and it's always been in the public's eye," said Terricka, who starred on E!'s "Candy Girls" in 2009. "But this is how we see us as opposed to

what's been said. He does have kids. That's the truth. But nobody knows what type of father he is, so this is an opportunity to share it with the world."

It's an opportunity that arose rather quickly. Terricka said she and Antonio together made the decision to pursue a show, unsure of what their kids would think of it. By this summer, though, with Cromartie less than a year removed from a spot on the Colts' roster, videographers were at their New Jersey house, a production company showed interest in their idea for a reality series and, most importantly, the children were on board.

"Thirty people were around them every given day," Terricka said. "But the kids loved it. We filmed a lot and for a while, but the crew kind of became like family to us. Eventually, they shopped the show around and USA green-lighted us for six episodes."

It's not as if Cromartie, who began his pro career with the San Diego Chargers, sought to broadcast his fatherhood for the sole purpose of proving that he is a capable dad, either. If anything, in fact, the Tallahassee native would deem his current responsibilities the toughest of his life. And that's saying something for a guy who made a living opposite Darrelle Revis, a seven-time Pro Bowler, guarding all-world wideouts like A.J. Green.

"The best wide receiver I faced was probably Brandon Marshall," Cromartie said, recalling years he'd see the former 6-foot-5 Miami Dolphins receiver twice a season. "But being at home, we have twins. They are everywhere -- in the ice machine, pouring the ice out the doors, in the cabinets. It's two versus one. It was one-on-one when I was on Brandon Marshall. Now, the twins are running every which way."

Cromartie combats the chaos with a "very hands-on" approach, said Terricka, who joked in a promo clip from their show that her husband has "Cro-CD," or a personal obsession with cleaning up after the kids. The "hands-on" mentality includes diaper duty for three of the kids, the youngest of whom was born in August, and it fluctuates with the season. On Halloween, for example, it involved finding costumes for -- and then suiting up -- half a dozen little Cromarties.

"The twins were Dory and Nemo from 'Finding Nemo,'" Terricka said. "Our oldest was a unicorn, Jagger was Deadpool and Jerzie was a zombie bride. I was Freddy Krueger."

And Mr. Cromartie himself?

"He went as dad," she laughed, her husband doing the same. "He went as Antonio Cromartie."

Although "The Cromarties" kickoff will mark the anticipated release of a product months in the works, the family still has lots of work ahead. There's taking care of the six kids, remember.

That comes with the stretch of winter holidays, when Terricka said the Cromarties will don matching pajamas as they decorate and find gifts, as they do each Christmas, to send to a needy family they "adopt." It comes with school

activities like Reading Day and outdoor field days, the latter of which "kids are always looking forward to" when a certain former NFL player shows up. And it comes with a lot of prayer, Antonio said, a lot of "letting God handle it."

It also comes with incorporating blended relatives, some of whom have made headlines in the past for publicly discussing the ups and downs of relationships with Cromartie.

"We would love all the children to be part of the show," Terricka said. "Some of them do live in other states, but God willing, the show is called 'The Cromarties,' so other children, whether they live in different places or not, are part of the Cromartie legacy."

The same critics who revert to Antonio's "Hard Knocks" comments, of course, also come with the territory of showcasing the everyday life of a multi-millionaire whose kin rival the numbers of TLC's "19 Kids and Counting."

But it's not something either of the Cromarties are too worried about. Antonio said he "used to" pay attention to those who judged him from a public lens but now takes solace in the fact that his kids, soon-to-be reality stars, "are well taken care of." Terricka, meanwhile, said she's reached the point where headlines dramatizing Cromartie's growing family don't faze her -- "If they say, 'Antonio Cromartie's having another baby,' I'd say, '*Shouldn't* he be having a baby by his wife?'"

And there are no shortage of babies that have been had.

Antonio Cromartie knows what you're thinking. He knows what he's said. He knows what's *been* said. In some eyes, perhaps, embracing reality TV only magnifies the topic, painting an NFL star as just another man with his hands full.

Behind the curtains of "The Cromarties," though, in the comfort and the challenges of his home away from football, he thinks you'd find a different picture. Kids that test him more than wide receivers. A wife who backs his every move. A family large in number but tight in connection.

"People would be," Terricka said, "surprised."