

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Max Iheanachor

Draft Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: At this point in time I want to introduce our team president, Art Rooney II.

ART ROONEY II: Good afternoon. Thanks for joining us this afternoon. We're excited to welcome Max Iheanachor to Pittsburgh today after a red eye last night. Max, I hope you're feeling all right.

We're pleased to have somebody who played in 32 games in his college career, gave up three sacks in 1153 passing attempts. Just had a great week at the Senior Bowl.

A lot to get excited about Max being here. Of course he is the first player that we've drafted from Arizona State since Marvel Smith, so great role model there for you, Max. I'm pleased to introduce Max Iheanachor. Welcome, Max.

MAX IHEANACHOR: Thank you, sir. I just want to give a special thank you to Mr. Rooney right here for bringing me in and giving me an opportunity, Mr. Khan and Mr. McCarthy. Thank you, for real. This means a lot to me. I'm ready to get to work, man.

Q. What do you know about Marvel Smith?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I know a little bit, man. He played at ASU, got drafted in 2000, second-round pick, played here for about eight years before going to the Niners. He's a really good player, man.

Q. Can you pronounce your last name for us?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, last name is pronounced "Ee-han-a-chor".

Q. Talk about the night last night, what it all meant, and how you got here today. Take us through your day.

MAX IHEANACHOR: Honestly, man, yesterday was unbelievable. Just a surreal moment for me and the family. Family was there, friends was there, coaches that was

with me where it all started, JuCo. Just got to really say thank you again to them in person. It was really a special moment. I'm happy I got to share that with them.

Q. Max, whenever you first started playing football at junior college, could you have ever expected this opportunity or envisioned this opportunity to be a first-round pick?

MAX IHEANACHOR: When I first started, honestly, I knew it was going to be hard. But obviously the vision was there, but I knew it was going to be hard. Just try to just get better every day and just put your head down and work, not to try to look too ahead and predict stuff. Just work every day; that was my whole motive.

Q. You told us yesterday about your AAU basketball coach being the inspiration for making the switch to the football field. Was there a specific conversation that stands out to you, or was it a cumulative thing, and what were some of those conversations like?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Honestly, it was after a summer basketball game. We was in the car. He just brought it up. He kind of already told me a little bit, but he brought it up and we actually had a real conversation in the car. It was probably like a 30-minute conversation, and he was like, man, look, I know high school is over, the basketball stuff. Man, you can probably look into football because he played back in his day, played at San Jose State, probably played a year or two in the league. He was just really advising me on that, telling me to really look forward to it, said he envisioned me being an offensive lineman. Ever since then, it's just been history.

Q. When you started playing, what did you immediately like about football, and what was the hardest thing for you to get used to?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I'd definitely say, football, the best thing I loved was just the process, just going through it. It's going to be hard times, just embracing that moment, learning from it, and definitely on the field just punishing people. In JuCo that was just fun, just getting to bully people.



Q. You've been taking us back further than that. What was it like coming here to the U.S. from Nigeria as a 13-year-old and I'm guessing football was pretty far from your mind at that point?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah. Yeah. Our football, we called it -- it was called football but it was soccer back home. Man, it's crazy, just coming as a kid, just excited. I watched a lot of American movies, seeing snow -- got to see snow for the first time in Atlanta. That's where we lived for six months. I remember me and my little brother went outside and tried to catch it and stuff. It was definitely a full moment as kids. But for my parents just making that transition, sacrificing everything they had built back home to put us in a better position for education, big shout-out to them.

Q. When you first started playing football, was it always offensive line right away, and what did you sort of grow to love about that job?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, the only position I ever played, yeah, definitely offensive lineman. I didn't really have no other choice. Just coming in that late, man, head coach told me offensive line. He didn't bring another position up, and that was all I was just used to, and just played.

Q. I talked to your JuCo head coach this morning. He recalled some of the early days of you playing football and some of the growing pains you went through. What were some of those difficult things to get a hold of in those first days? What do you remember about those first experiences with football?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Honestly, going in, I just remember I'd keep saying this, what the hell is an A-gap, a B-gap. It was like, you've got to know all these things. I'm like, bro, you can't just line up and go block? It was like, no, you need to know. So just being detailed as an offensive lineman, just knowing the little things really matter in this game. Man, it's a game of inches. Being detailed definitely as an offensive lineman, that's key. That whole piece of it, that was really it.

Q. You've primarily played on the right side. Mike McCarthy spoke last night about position flexibility and the importance of that. How do you embrace possibly playing at another position outside of right tackle?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, I'm open to it. Been training this whole off-season for it. I played left tackle in JuCo, played right tackle at ASU. Wherever the coaches put me that's where I played. I'm open to that; ready to just get to

work.

Q. Along those lines, too, how much do you know about the group of guys that are in that room on the offensive line in Pittsburgh, and how do you think you fit in with this current group?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, I watched a lot of offensive linemen. Broderick when he got drafted, Georgia, watched him; Troy Fautanu, got to play him. He actually texted me last night, too, welcoming me. Got to watch him, played against him when he won the championship that year. It was just really cool seeing him reaching out to me and just welcoming me. Andrus Peat, he played -- I played with his younger brother at ASU, too.

Q. Is this your first time in Pittsburgh?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, yeah, it's my first time.

Q. What are your first thoughts about seeing the city?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Man, it's beautiful. I just remember that tunnel, coming out of that tunnel, and bam, just hitting me, like okay. I liked it.

Q. Your offensive line coach, Coach Saga, was talking to us earlier today, and he said he found you sort of by accident in junior college because he was going to look at another tackle. Do you feel like that was sort of fate for you, winding up where you did at Arizona State, following him out there, and do you have the same feeling about how you wound up here?

MAX IHEANACHOR: No, honestly, everything happens for a reason. It's really just all God's plan. That's how he met me, and I can't be mad at that. Just the opportunity -- he also got to recruit the other tackle that was there, too. He was a hell of a good player. It's all God's plan. It just worked out in his favor. Without him, none of this is possible.

Q. Do you remember what you did to impress him, to catch his eye that day?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Honestly, we never really know when coaches come into practice. They kind of just show up and watch. Just practice hard like I always do. He liked that, so yeah.

Q. When we had talked with your JuCo coach earlier today, he also mentioned a moment when you came up to him and said, I don't know if football is for me; I don't know if I want to do this anymore. Looking back at that personnel, what would be your message?

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MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, honestly, that first year was rough, switching to a new sport. I wasn't playing, had to gain weight, and honestly, if you guys are used to Nigerian parents, they love doctors, nurses, so my mom was kind of on my ass. She was like, man, you're not even playing, you're wasting your time, you should go to a four-year. So just kind of really sat down and was like, man, my parents, they wanted me to go to a four-year; that was the whole point of us coming out here. They're really big on education. The first year was really rough, but that just showed I just stayed through it and just kept fighting every day and just tried to get better.

Q. As of right now, what do you enjoy the most, pass protect or run block?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I love both. I take pride in both those -- they're very big aspects. But obviously running the ball really helps a lot, make everybody else's job easier when you can run the ball efficiently. But I'd definitely say really both. They're pretty high, protecting the quarterback, just taking pride in my job. That's what I'm here for is to pass protect and run block.

Q. When you saw Bailey get drafted so high, did you say, I beat that guy, the 2 pick from Texas Tech?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I mean, yeah, we did beat them. We was the only loss they had into the playoffs. It was a great match-up, man. I also trained with him this off-season. He's a great guy, just both guys being competitive, just going out there and playing hard. I was excited for him, though.

Q. Did you think to yourself, I can do this, I should go first round too?

MAX IHEANACHOR: No, I knew I could do this for sure, without a doubt. I knew for sure I could do this.

Q. You said you didn't know what an A-gap was when you first played the sport. Where do you feel you're at? Do you feel like you're still learning in terms of what you need to do? Where are you at especially at the NFL level?

MAX IHEANACHOR: No, I'm straight. I'm straight. It was just the little details in football. Everything else was just play wise and stuff, just doing your job. That's just the small details at the time that I didn't understand. I thought you just lined up and just played. But there's more stuff to it for sure.

Q. You were telling that story about questioning if

football was right for you at one point. Was that the toughest moment in this journey or does something else stand out in that regard?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I wouldn't say it was just -- it was kind of like everybody around me, my basketball coaches from high school, parents, they was just like, why did you leave basketball. It was kind of tough. I was really young. I was 17 at the time, just trying to just figure football out by myself.

It was definitely a growing moment for me. Definitely needed, yeah.

Q. You were talking about having some doubts at some point and then you were saying even before that match-up with Texas Tech you knew you could do this. Was there a moment in there where that clicked for you, that you were going to be able to do this as a career?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Yeah, I'd definitely say first year at ASU, just playing that first year when I got there from JuCo. I grew so much in that first year, after that first year, and ever since then it's just been the confidence level at its highest, so yeah.

Q. You're relatively new to the game. How have you developed a love for the game, when you hear Omar and Mike and these guys talk about finding Steelers, finding Steelers players? How do you find that love for the game?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I'd definitely say throughout the whole process, that's what I fell in love with. Started with the process for sure, waking up every day, going and -- especially in this position, it's one of the most selfless positions out there. Just taking pride in my job and just going to war with the brothers next to me. That's what the whole front is about, just going out there, all five guys on the same page dominating. That's fun. And winning, got to win a championship, Big 12 at ASU, one of the best moments of my life other than last night.

Q. As a late comer to football, did you feel like teams in the pre-draft process were kind of trying to see, does this guy really love it? Is he just playing because he's big? We also have a clip of Vrabel roughing you up and getting in your grille. Was that something teams were trying to ask you about in this process?

MAX IHEANACHOR: I would say no, man. I would say no, I wasn't really questioned about that. Just the way I just go about things, man, if you have a question about my love for the game, then you've just got to watch harder,

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how I do s--- and just what I go about and what I'm about as a man.

But I'd definitely say the clip -- it was a clip. He was just trying to coach me up, hand placement, stuff like that, and just seeing my recovery.

Q. When you were in college do you remember what you weighed when you started, when you were in high school, and did you actually grow height-wise since you started playing football?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Honestly, I probably grew about an inch, maybe. I'm not too sure on that. I hope I did. Weight-wise I was about 250 going into JuCo, so yeah.

Q. Do you feel like the moment -- you're here in Pittsburgh and you got drafted. Do you feel like it's set in yet, and if so, when did it hit you?

MAX IHEANACHOR: Man, it still feels like it's crazy. It's crazy still. I don't know if it's ever going to die. But it's just really exciting, just being blessed. All we can ask for in this life is opportunity. God, you pray for stuff, and you've just got to do the work, and everything else falls into place. These guys, big shout-out to them, forever in debt, and I'm ready to get to work.

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