

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Eli Heidenreich

Draft Day Press Conference



ELI HEIDENREICH: I just want to start off, I think some thank yous are in line. First off, thank you to Mr. Rooney, Mr. Khan, and to Coach McCarthy for giving me this opportunity and taking a chance on me.

I'm thankful for the coaches back at Navy that have helped get me to this spot, Coach Newberry, Coach Yokitis, Coach Cole, Coach Cronin. Then my family, they have a big role in why I'm here. So I'm super thankful for my family as well.

Q. Eli, the Steelers were very touched at that moment at the end when you were introduced. What was that like for you?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It was pretty incredible. The biggest thing for me is I turned that corner and you see the city skyline in the background, and the crowd is like 90 percent black and gold. It's all Steelers fans out there. It was such a cool moment. Everything just kind of came together.

I was pretty overwhelmed with emotions, but I'm just thankful that I had this opportunity that the NFL invited me to be in the green room and allowed for this moment to be even more special.

Q. As the draft was approaching, did you allow yourself the thought of maybe the Steelers are going to take me?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think leading up to the draft there's always some buzz going around, especially from your agent, he's hearing things from different teams. I think that buzz was probably the loudest from the Steelers. So I definitely had some sort of inkling coming into the draft that the Steelers were interested, and I would potentially be drafted by them.

Time was ticking down at the end, and I saw they had one more pick. I was hoping back of my mind, like come on, and the call came through. It was pretty cool.

Q. I know it only happened an hour ago, but has it sunk in yet?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I don't think fully. I think it's going to take a little bit of time probably to sleep on it and wake up tomorrow morning, like I'm a Pittsburgh Steeler now. I think it hasn't fully set in.

Q. What can you do for the Steelers as a player?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think the biggest thing about me is you're getting a football player on offense that can do a lot of different things. It's something I've been doing for almost eight years now, high school and college, playing a few different positions at a high level.

On the offensive side of things you're getting some versatility. Then on special teams I played all four phases in college. So I'm able to contribute there and make a difference.

I think the biggest thing is you look at the Steelers organization and the mentality that this team's been built off, I think I bring that same thing, that toughness, that grittiness, that not only the Steelers, but the city of Pittsburgh has always been about.

Q. When you saw the Steelers call you, did you know at that moment it was the Steelers, or did you think it was a friend's number I forgot to save in my phone?

ELI HEIDENREICH: My first thought was definitely Steelers. I saw they were on the clock. I was just it all kind of hit me at once, but yeah, I thought it was them.

Q. Do you remember the first moment when you dreamed as a kid maybe of playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers, and what was the key to making that dream a reality?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think the earliest moment for me that I can remember is watching the Steelers play the Cardinals in the Super Bowl and just watching that game and everything that took place for us to go out and win that Super Bowl, I think that was really when it started.

I remember James Harrison, that play specifically, his 100-yard pick six. I went and asked my dad shortly after that for a James Harrison jersey, which I got later on that summer. That's kind of when it started.

Q. What do you look forward to being back where you're from? What will that be like?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think the biggest thing I'm looking forward to is just devoting 100 percent of my time to football. The last four years, I've kind of had this juggling match of just military and academics and football and just trying to find time for everything. This is the first time that I'll really have all of my time to dedicate to football. I'm excited for that.

Q. As a Pittsburgh guy, what was it like seeing the city kind of transformed by the draft? Could you imagine seeing the draft stage in front of Acrisure Stadium and you walking across it?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It was pretty cool seeing it all take place. I'm glad this city got the publicity for the draft. I think people are finally starting to realize this city rocks. More people need to realize what goes down here.

Just kind of how everything was set up, I think it was such a fantastic event across the board, and I think everything went right. For me to be able to go out there and kind of contribute to that and be a part of this event was really special.

Q. You went from a zero star recruit to now an NFL football player. What were some of the most important things in your journey that allowed you to achieve this?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think, like you said, not being super highly recruited, for me it was kind of frustrating initially. You're wondering why am I not getting stars or offers, whatever it may be?

But something my dad really helped me understand is use this as a fuel, way to motivate you. It taught me how to work. It taught me how to make myself better on my own accord. I think that's the biggest lesson that I kind of took away from that time is just use it as motivation and become a better football player as a result.

Q. Your commitment with the Navy, what does that look like moving forward here?

ELI HEIDENREICH: May 22nd is my graduation, and I'll commission into the reserves in the United States Marine Corps. All of my time and focus will be on football. I won't

have any military obligations to take me away from football. They may ask me to do some PR-related event in the off-season to shine a light on the Marine Corps, on the military, but that's all I'll have to do.

Afterwards I'll have a choice to go back and serve in an active role, but as far as I'm concerned right now, I'm worried about being a Steeler.

Q. Is there a Steeler or non-Steeler past or present that you model your game after?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I've always looked up to Christian McCaffrey. I think he's just a fantastic player and plays the game the right way. Watching him and the way, especially in the pass game, the way he's able to get open and make things happen in space is something I've always tried to study and replicate.

Q. What was your journey at the Naval Academy like?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It was tough some days. That's done on purpose. It's designed to be stressful. They want you to have to operate in a stressful environment and get used to that.

I'm thankful for those tough times. There were some long nights there. You've got a lot on your plate. But it just teaches you how to deal with that stress and really time management, be able to plan out your days and weeks in the time that makes sense for you.

The academy is tough sometimes, but I'm glad I went through that struggle. I think it made me a better person.

Q. Does that prepare you for days like today, or do you still get nervous as you wait to hear your name called?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I was definitely nervous. My heart was definitely elevated today, I would say, more than usual. Sitting on a couch isn't too bad compared to what we've got to do on a day-to-day basis there.

Q. You mentioned getting a James Harrison jersey. He was around this weekend. Did you get a chance to talk to him?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I did not get a chance, but I would love to sometime.

Q. Do you still have that jersey?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I would assume so. I did not get rid of it. It would be something like my parents would be like,



it doesn't fit him anymore, but yeah.

Q. Kind of reflecting back on your 2021 state title, how did that grow your football career? What did that teach you, especially to do it alongside a guy like Alex Tecza, who became then obviously your teammate?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It's funny you ask. You look at that Mt. Lebanon team. We're a normal public school. There's no recruiting going on. That senior class I played with that year, I'd been playing with literally my entire life since first grade. We played football throughout growing up, and that senior year we happened to be really good.

I think that was the result of us playing so long together and getting to know each other and kind of having this love for each other, this like brotherly love. I think that really taught me that an important part of any football team is that connection you have to your teammates and making sure that you're looking out for them.

The same thing goes at Navy. There's no NIL or anything like that. It's just you're worried about your brothers to the left and right of you. So that's something I took away from that.

Q. Did you go to games growing up or go out to training camp or anything like that?

ELI HEIDENREICH: For the Steelers?

Q. Yes.

ELI HEIDENREICH: I went to a bunch. I was at the game where we beat the Ravens when we missed a field goal in December. That was the most recent game. I went to the playoff game last year in Baltimore. Definitely got chirped a little bit. I was full Steelered up. I've been to a ton growing up and even recently.

Q. Do you wear jerseys now still?

ELI HEIDENREICH: If I go to a game, I will.

Q. What do you have in your collection?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I snatched my dad's old Polamalu jersey, and an old Rod Woodson jersey that I'll throw on.

Q. You talked about being a reservist. While you are, do you have any kind of obligations in terms of annual training or anything like that?

ELI HEIDENREICH: As far as I'm concerned, no. I've been talking with Rayuan Lane, he's a safety in

Jacksonville, got drafted out of Navy last year. He hasn't had to deal with any of that. The only thing he'll have to do, like I said, is that PR, kind of a few things in the off-season. Nothing significant, nothing in season.

Q. How does your military physical training prepare you for football training?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I think the biggest thing you train for in the military is just conditioning, being able to operate a real long time. It's something we definitely do in the academy offense. We try to wear you down throughout the game.

I'd say that conditioning is something I've worked on throughout my career and something I do well.

Q. How are you going to spend the rest of tonight, and what does the next couple weeks look like for you until rookie minicamp?

ELI HEIDENREICH: I live about 15, 20 minutes from here. I have a bunch of family and friends at my house, and then like 20 of my Naval Academy football teammates drove up for the weekend. We had a little convoy coming in after class on Friday. They're all waiting back at the house. I'm going to go hang out with them.

Q. Is that still Mt. Lebanon?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It is, yeah.

Q. What's it like being among Ravens fans for the past three, four years?

ELI HEIDENREICH: It's pretty rough sometimes. There's a lot at the academy too. Since it's in Maryland, it's a pretty close proximity to Baltimore. You're definitely around them. You just have to close your ears sometimes.

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