

Q & A with Nick Eason of the Arizona Cardinals

Written by Interview by Dexter Presley

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With experience and leadership on his side, Nick Eason has become a strong link for the Arizona Cardinals. Not only does he use past experience to become a better person and player, he uses them to motivate others. Here, he talks about his foundation, his hopes for the coming football season and the Cardinals' new coach.



AFM: What are you doing on the east coast?

NE: My family is here, and my children are here, and my grandmother is here. So I try to spend a lot of time with her during the off season and with my family. I went to a wedding--one of my teammates got married, visiting my local church and doing some things out in the community. Just enjoying the hometown for right now.

AFM: Can you give us a rundown of the type of things that you do with your foundation?

NE: For me... I have my foundation and we focus on treatments and the difficulties that go on with cancer patients. That came about with my mother and the struggles she had with cancer, chemo and radiation. I've done a lot of stuff in that.

I love children, and you'll see me doing a lot of work within the school systems and trying to be a good role model. I realized that there are a lot of unfit homes out there, and I try to influence kids in the most positive way. So I volunteer my time and go to schools in the area I grew up in and try to motivate them to become better individuals and better students because those kids are our future. I think a lot of kids are exposed to a lot of things--one thing that I was exposed to as a child and I think it is important that individuals like myself and other people out there that are great examples, should try to intercept the things that they could potentially run into on television or even at home without parental supervision.

AFM: So you're being that positive role model that kids may not have a home?

NE: Absolutely, man. And it's needed. I grew up in a single-parent home, and I was primarily raised by my grandparents growing up as a kid. It was tough. My mother had me when she was 19-years-old while she was in college and my grandparents watched me while she was at school. So I try to tell kids all the time, "Everybody has a story, we all have a story, even I have a story." You can't let life's circumstances make you fearful of being successful. There are a lot of guys in the NFL that have a terrible [situations], both parents losing their lives to AIDS, etc. and with that all being said, still being able to be successful. It's important that we reach out and I'm on a great platform to do so. It's our obligation as professional athletes to get out in the community and serve and a lot of times, it's not about the money or award, it has to be about the heart and that's what I'm all about.

AFM: So you're paving the way for a lot of other people, especially by showing them that sometimes life may be giving you difficulty or something may come up but you have to stay on your path.

NE: Absolutely, man. Even as a professional athlete, since college, I've lost 19 of my family members; mom, brother, two older aunts and a ton of people. It was my most difficult time in my career losing my uncle in June and then my mother, less than a month later. It can definitely become a distraction, and some people may not be able to recover from that. But I'm able to because the biggest thing for me is that I've remained humble over the years and believing in my faith so I think that's helped me in trying times. I'm a very battle-tested person, I've been through a lot in my life and I'm a good listener so I see what other people go through and use that as a motivator for myself, even as a professional athlete.

We can always learn something no matter where we are in life. No matter how smart you are or how many academic accolades you may have, there's always room to learn more. I've learned things from people who don't have two college degrees or who are not professional athletes that have quit school and just sit up under a tree. Everybody has some type of knowledge that we can apply to our lives.

AFM: It's an incredible thing that you've been able to continue despite all of those losses.

NE: It was tough. I buried my mom on Sunday, and had to be back to work the next day. In the NFL, life must go on and it's my job to play on Sundays. God doesn't put you in anything that you can't bear.

Kids look at some of us like we're super heroes--like we don't have any problems or like life is perfect and it's not really that way. I'm very fortunate and blessed to have more things than other people do, but more money is more problems sometimes. I just try to stay very humble and level headed, because I don't want the game of football to make who I am as a person. So when I'm done playing, I can still be comfort with

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who I am as a person. And that's the most important thing, man.

AFM: Back in October, you destroyed a car in support of breast cancer..

NE: It was a really an opportunity for me to--the car obviously represented breast cancer and it allowed me to do something that I want to find a cure for, not only for the life of my mom but for lives of others too. My mom, like thousands or million of women, who have experienced breast cancer and it was the opportunity let out a frustration in myself to destroy it. I wish it was that easy to take a sledge hammer to it and it's over. I was glad to take upon the opportunity because I had never done anything like that before.

AFM: What has been the key to your longevity and success?

NE: One, I think I am a very hard worker and very disciplined. I'm a student of the game. I've seen so many guys come to the NFL that can run and jump and look pretty, but they can't play on Sundays. I think being able to play multiple positions and having versatility and being able to adjust has allowed me to play for a long time. Having a good relationship with my teammates, and being a motivator. Having the concept of what it means to be a team. I'm battle-tested, on and off the field. I've experienced a lot of success, especially when I played for the Pittsburgh Steelers and downs, when I played with the Cleveland Browns. I've played with a lot of great players, and I've learned a lot.

I want to coach when I'm done playing. I'm a good teacher, a lot of guys can play but can't coach, but I think I can transfer the things I do onto paper, and also allow another person to do what I do on the defensive line. You want a guy that can show guys and can relate to guys what it takes to get to that level. It's not really about me, but it's definitely about a team of guys that are on the same page and that are willing to sacrifice for a greater cause.

AFM: Do you think those difficulties early on in your career helped later on in your career?

NE: I went through a lot. If you look up my bio, it'll say, I left training camp and it was a learning experience about how magnified the NFL really is. I left, and didn't really communicate with my coach due to an emergency. Took off, they say that I was "missing" and I went through that.

I got hurt my rookie year, and then I came back I played in NFL Europe for three months. Came back, and went to training camp and then got cut down to the practice squad. I was on the practice squad for about five weeks in Denver, left went to San Francisco 49ers, but then had some cap issues so flew back to Denver and the Cleveland and played there for three years. The first year, I played in I think one game and only recorded two or three tackles that entire season. The following years, I got a lot of playing time, but didn't really experience a lot of success as a team. Then, I was fortunate to try out with the Pittsburgh Steelers, and I was really surprised because the Pittsburgh Steelers had been a really successful teams, and had gone to the Super Bowl the previous year, and I was coming from the Browns and didn't really have any big time stats and wondered what they saw in me.

And once I got there, I realized that the mentality and character of the guys were related to the character that I had. I was glad to be a part of that team, and it showed up not only in my stats, but showed up by us going to the playoffs and two Super Bowls while I was there.

Then I came to Arizona, which they call the Pittsburgh west. My first year, we were 1-6, and I can't remember the last time I lost six games straight, even with the Browns. But being that I had been in those circumstances before allowed me to be able to mentor younger guys who had never experienced that and regardless of your failures you have to continue to work and work together as a team and identify what problems there are and why you're losing. We have a ton of talent; the best d-line, the best receivers, and linebackers, but you still lose games.

AFM: A lot of players, especially the ones that have success early on, when things don't go as planned or they start losing a few games, they can't handle it.

NE: I agree, it's so true, it shows up. Some guys can't handle a loss or not being successful, but you can see the guys that have long careers have been through ups and downs and haven't been successful always. It's about how they come back, and that's the type of guy you want on your team. Things are not always going to be pretty, and you're going to lose tough games. But you have to learn how to come back from that and use that loss as a motivation to get better. It can be done.

AFM: Last season had several ups and downs--that being said, the Cardinals still have potential and promise to return to a high level of play. What type of steps do you think need to be made to return to this?

NE: I think we've started the process with the hiring of Bruce Arians. Wisenhunt is a great coach, and still is great coach, but at the end of the day the NFL is a business of wins and losses. Sometimes great coaches lose games and can lose a lot of games and changes will be made. I think the coaching staff that they've put in place is one of the better in the league, just from the experience that the guys have. I think we are going to be a better team. We're going to be very good this year.

It's exciting, man. This last year, so many different mistakes were made and it cost us a lot of games. Obviously when you're losing games, people get frustrated, we all get frustrated. It's tough as a veteran guy like myself, to keep guys on a positive note, when you lose so many games straight. It's really tough, but it's behind us now. Free agency is about to start in a couple weeks, and I'm excited to what changes we are going to make to bring us back to winning football.

AFM: Have you been able to sit down with Coach Arians yet and what type of things do guys do now, before the season starts?

NE: I haven't been able to sit down with him yet. But for me, I'm working on flexibility and staying on top of the playbook and watching film. The biggest thing is working out and taking care of my body and trying to rest up from a season. And just focusing on areas that I can improve on.

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AFM: What type of outlook do you have on the season--new season, new coach, new expectations?

NE: I'm really excited. I think that, we can say, we're excited about the new coach, but I'm an older guy, I've been down this road before. I think the season tells the story of what it could become, and I'm not talking about the four games. Obviously. . . we did that last year, we were 4-0 and everyone said we were going to the Super Bowl. Me, being a veteran guy, I understand that four games in nothing. I'm excited for the new coach but I'm excited to also get the team together and get consistent because if we can play like we did the first four games, we can get back to winning football.

AFM: Is it hard coming into the season with so many changes?

NE: For me, I'm able to handle change and remain level headed and at a level ground. My job, and everybody's job as a player, anytime when you get a new coach is to produce on the field. We're paid to handle situations where you experience coaching changes. I think it's a sign of the willingness to get back to winning football, because we really do have good players. I'm excited for the guys we do have that are coming back. I'm excited, but as a veteran guy, I know that we still have to come together as a new team with new coaches and go through training camp and go through the season and win one game at a time.

AFM: What are some of your fave things to do in the Valley?

NE: I spend a lot of time----that's what I do, I am a musician. I'm a bass guitarist, and I play the drums as well. I do obviously like going to the Mine Wine Cellar, it has a laid back atmosphere. I do some boxing at Glove Game. I love boxing, it's some of the best training that you can have as an athlete. Boxers are in the best shape. I like going up Camelback Mountain, here and there.

I love food--I'm big on sushi, wasabi. I'm also a big fan of Wildfish, and that's another place I frequent. I love the music and the food and the area. The Arizona Cardinals do a great job of getting us out in the community. I do attend a lot of football camps, last year I did a ton of events with Big Red, and actually reading in schools. Safeway would bring in cookies and milk for the kids to have after I finished reading to them. I love Phoenix; it will go down in my top five places to live after I retire.

AFM: Are you going to have any events coming up for you foundation?

NE: I'm definitely going to do some fundraising and a football camp, not this year, but the following year, because it's a little too late to try to plan a football camp. But I definitely want to. I have a big following out in Ahwatukee.