

Justin Pugh: Q&A with the Arizona Cardinals New Offensive Lineman

Written by Kiley Warren

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Arizona Cardinals offensive lineman Justin Pugh. Photo courtesy of the Arizona Cardinals.

Football season has officially begun. And with a new quarterback and a new head coach, the Cardinals roster is set to feature more than a few fresh faces this season. One of those newbies is the Pennsylvania-born, offensive lineman Justin Pugh. Pugh was drafted in the first round of the 2013 NFL Draft by the New York Giants. After playing with the team for five years, and battling a back injury last season, the guard is excited to start a new chapter in the Valley of the Sun. Earlier this year, Pugh signed a five-year, \$45-million contract with the Arizona Cardinals.

We had the opportunity to talk with Pugh about the Cardinals team dynamic, how he's adjusting to life in Arizona and how the food scene is here, compared to New York.



Arizona Cardinals offensive lineman Justin Pugh. Photo courtesy of the Arizona Cardinals.

AFM: What made you want to come and play football for the Arizona Cardinals?

Justin Pugh: The culture was the biggest thing. I got here and met the coaching staff, Coach Wilks—an unbelievable leader of men. Then I also met, Steve Keim, the GM, who was awesome. And then obviously Mr. Bidwill, the owner of the team. What they put together and how they operate as an organization is something that I wanted to be a part of. And it has been a great marriage ever since then.

AFM: So how are you and your family adjusting to life in the Valley so far?

JP: Arizona, and the Phoenix area, is the complete opposite of New York City. Me and my girlfriend just bought a house during the summer and now we're dealing with monsoons and shoveling dirt off the end of my driveway. We're dealing with AC units going. But it's been unbelievable, we love it here. We heard that the weather is supposed to be getting cooler come October, so we're excited for that.

AFM: Have you had the chance to visit any Phoenix hot spots yet?

JP: I live in the Arcadia area in Scottsdale, so when we were at training camp we went to La Piazza Al Forno, it's a pizza place in Glendale, and it was really good pizza. The Henry is one of the places we like. But by travel-wise, I haven't gotten to see much yet. I haven't been to Sedona yet, I haven't gotten up to Flagstaff yet, but I'm looking forward to getting to do that in the off-season.

AFM: I have to ask—I'm sure that there's no comparison—but what is the pizza like here compared to New York?

JP: Um, it's different. It's definitely different. I went to La Piazza Al Forno, it was gourmet pizza, so it was like thin crust and they make it in a traditional Italian way. The New York-style pizza is its own different style of pizza. It's more of like a thin crust, a greasier crust. But I have had some really good food here. The restaurant scene out here is awesome.

AFM: There's a lot of new faces on the Cardinals roster this year, including a new quarterback and a new head coach. So, what as a team have you guys been doing to try to strengthen that group dynamic so that you're ready for the season?

JP: What I will say is that this has been the closest group that I've been a part of since joining the NFL. We do dinners together. Larry Fitzgerald threw a disco-glam themed party for everyone that made the team, to come out and enjoy themselves, to bring their wives and family. Our coach took us to the movies as a team. And we just do different things. So, now I know a lot more guys, on more than just a football level,

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which has been really, really fun. And that's something that I've enjoyed the most about being on the team.

AFM: Coming off of a back injury and missing eight games last season, how is your mindset different going into this season?

JP: Free agency definitely affected [it]. Going through that process, a lot of teams actually thought I had surgery on my back, which I didn't. So, talking to a lot of teams, telling them that I was fine, proving to them that I was healthy was a big thing. Arizona was my first visit, and once I got here, they wouldn't let me leave. And it ended up being the best thing for me. Obviously, health wise, I'm 100 percent.

AFM: Justin, as exciting as it may be to start this new chapter in your career with the Cardinals, the Giants were the team that drafted you in 2013. So, after playing five seasons with them, was it disappointing to not get that call from them during free agency?

JP: Yeah, it was definitely disappointing. I'm from the East Coast. Obviously, all of my friends are Eagles fans, so they were happy that I was gone from New York. But, definitely the human element is tough. I'm farther away from my family, and that was the biggest con of coming to Arizona. Probably the only negative about coming out here. The weather is better, the culture I've enjoyed a lot. But the time difference, the three hours being away from my family is definitely a tough thing. But, we've worked through it. My mom has come out already, my stepdad has come out, my sister and my brothers are coming out this weekend. So, that's really been unbelievable. Obviously, I miss a lot of the guys in New York that I played with. But, because New York has hired a whole new staff, they've gotten rid of almost every guy that I was really there with, on the offensive line side of things. So, I'll miss my friends in New York. I'll miss the connections I made, the fans. But obviously this is a great opportunity for me and I couldn't be more excited about being in Arizona and playing for the Cardinals.

AFM: Aside from winning, what else would you most like to see yourself accomplish as a player this season?

JP: So, obviously I think that goals and having goals is one of the most important things to do. So obviously on the field, those types of things kind of speak for themselves. But for me, personally, I want to start all 16 games. I haven't done that since my rookie year, so that's one goal of mine. Obviously, a team goal of ours is to just win the NFC West. You can't get to the playoffs, obviously, the Super Bowl, you can't do all of those things until you dominate your own division. So, dominate our division. And I want to set up and do a camp for kids out here. I do one in my hometown, I would love to get one set up out here. To work with the kids, work with the youth, and just interact and learn more about this community out here.