



Steeler Nation

For a Cause

By Jennifer Brozak



One afternoon, former Steelers punter Josh Miller and his friend Shawn Allen were at a neighborhood gathering in Treesdale, enjoying a few drinks, when Miller began to recall stories about the fervent loyalty of Steelers fans at away games. At the Arizona Cardinals' stadium, for example, he had been amazed at how many Terrible Towels he had seen waving in the stands.

The neighbors eventually broached the subject of Steelers bars, and how there is likely a Steelers fan club in every city in the country. At away games, they wondered, could there possibly be more Steelers fans than home team fans?

It was from this casual conversation that an idea took flight. During the 2013 NFL season, Miller and Allen made a plan to visit every Steelers bar in the country, and then write a book detailing the experience.

Miller, who maintains a great relationship with the Steelers and the Rooney family, delivered the concept to Art Rooney, who loved it. The book, aptly titled *Always a Home Game: Our Journey Through Steelers Country in 140 Days*, was born.

From his experience of traveling with the team, Miller was aware that fan loyalty to the Pittsburgh Steelers runs deep. However, the two were shocked to learn during their initial research that there are more than 850 Steelers bars scattered across the country, located in every state and throughout the world.

"We knew we were pushing our luck attempting this stunt, and there was no way we could visit them all... and stay married," says Allen. Allen and Miller decided to limit the journey to the 32 NFL markets and visit 100 bars – in just 140 days.

"It seemed like a good idea on paper," says Miller, laughing. "Shawn is a very detail-oriented person, and I'm like the butterfly that needs a leash. So I thought, 'If it makes sense to Shawn, then it must be a good idea.'"

During the course of their journey, Miller's schedule mandated that he had to be in Pittsburgh on Mondays for his radio show on 93.7 The Fan. This would be impossible if they were visiting bars on the West Coast. So, instead, Miller conducted the radio shows from what was essentially a closet in a CBS studio.

"Being on the road was a bit of a shock at first," says Miller. "We didn't realize how much our lives and families would be affected."

Allen, who is married and has two children, agrees. "The time we visited Boston was brutal. The Steelers and Patriots kicked off at 4:15 p.m. We drove the 34-ft. RV to Boston (parking an RV in Boston may have actually been the hardest part) and then we left immediately after the game. The RV, on a good day, hit 60 miles per hour, so it was a long 11-plus-hour drive home," says Allen.

"It was absolutely heartbreaking to call our wives when we were in the Florida Keys in the middle of winter," jokes Miller, the father of three. "We would always tell them it was raining, no matter where we were or what the weather was like."

To narrow the field of bars they would visit, Miller and Allen asked interns to research specific markets.

Using social media, they created a poll for each city and the bars with the most votes were included in the book. The interns then scheduled the group's arrival.

Since there were only 20 away games, many times the pair would visit bars on non-game days. This, however, did not dampen the zeal of the Steelers Nation. At a bar in Houston on a non-game day, close to 200 fans showed up to meet Miller and Allen.

"[The staff] played a DVD of Steelers Super Bowl highlights and threw a huge party," says Allen. "Having never been a 'celebrity,' it was cool to have people ask for your autograph and want to take pictures with you – all because I was writing a book about Steelers fans. It was an amazing experience."

At every home game during the 2013 season, Miller and Allen and their entourage were featured on the big screen at Heinz Field 10 minutes before kickoff – in the opposing team's city.

"For the Ravens game, we were filming live from a bar in Baltimore," says Allen.

From conception to completion, the whole process took about a year. Once the bars had been visited and the notes had been compiled, Miller and Allen worked with St. Lynn's Press, which is located on the South Side next to the Steelers practice facility, to publish the book. It was released in August just as training camp kicked off. There are promotional events scheduled at local Barnes & Noble stores in December. Miller and Allen have also collaborated with Rivertowne Brewery to produce "Always a Home Game" beer.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of each book is donated to a charity, including the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society or the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

"It feels great to be able to raise money and give back for everyone who's supported us over the years," says Miller.

To purchase *Always a Home Game*, visit alwayshomegame.com. To stay up-to-date on promotional appearances, follow the team on Facebook at facebook.com/alwayshomegame. ■

