

Carroll County Times

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Ravens, Steelers fans have fun with rivalry

By Brandon Oland, Times Staff Writer

ELDERSBURG — Roberta Donahue runs a day care out of her Eldersburg home, which features Baltimore Ravens photos and posters covering the basement walls.

Her husband Jeff has the “old-school” Ravens logo tattooed on his right leg and has attended every Baltimore Ravens home game.

Her son Jeff Jr. frequently wears a T-shirt that says “Wacko for Flacco,” in tribute to the Ravens rookie quarterback.

So you can imagine the reaction when 3-year-old Xander Geist and his 1-year-old sister Aubrey arrived at day care Friday morning wearing tiny black and gold Pittsburgh Steelers jerseys.



Dylan Slagle/Staff photo
Jeff Donahue, 10, and his mother, Roberta, move about Saturday in the club basement of their Eldersburg home, which is adorned with Ravens memorabilia, photos and giant team decals.

“What am I supposed to do?” said Kelli Geist, Xander and Aubrey’s mother, when asked how she could do such a thing. “The Steelers are our team.”

When the Pittsburgh Steelers face the Baltimore Ravens at 4:15 p.m. today, the bitter rivals will have plenty at stake.

Pittsburgh can clinch the NFC North Division title and the No. 2 seed in the conference with a win.

Baltimore could force a tie for the division lead and perhaps clinch a postseason berth with a victory.

In addition, the legions of Ravens and Steelers fans have bragging rights riding on this showdown.

Carroll County features thousands of Ravens supporters, the byproduct of Baltimore’s proximity to the area and the Ravens holding training camp at McDaniel College in Westminster each summer.

Grocery stores are full of shoppers wearing purple and black Ravens jerseys each Sunday.

The waiters and waitresses at several local restaurants wear Ravens gear on Sundays.

The Westminster Denny’s sign off Md. 140 features two words: “Go Ravens.”

But whether Ravens fans want to admit it or not, a fair number of Pittsburgh Steelers fans are lurking in the area.

Mike Naused, the chairman of Ravens Nest 14, the Sykesville/Eldersburg chapter of the Chamber of Ravens Nests, said he has a neighbor with a Steelers banner plastered in his front yard.

“I’m surprised somebody hasn’t taken it down,” Naused said.

Wes Menser, a manager for Shenk and Tittle Sporting Goods at TownMall in Westminster, said Steelers merchandise sales are currently lagging behind the Ravens, Redskins and Cowboys.

But he said a loyal group of Steelers fans visits the store repeatedly to purchase hats, T-shirts and jerseys.

Menser said sales were especially brisk during Pittsburgh's run to the Super Bowl three years ago but that purchases vary year to year, depending on the success of the franchise.

"I guarantee you," Menser said, "if the Steelers win, [their sales] will skyrocket this week."

The presence of both Ravens and Steelers fans in the same community leads to plenty of good-natured barbs whenever the two teams play.

Kelli and Chad Geist are from Butler, Pa., a town located 40 miles north of Pittsburgh and full of rabid Steelers fans.

The Geists relocated to Eldersburg, where job prospects were better, after college.

They continued rooting for the Steelers and are raising their two young children, to be Terrible Towel wavers.

They have taught Xander to say "Purple is for pansies," and it's common for both Geist tiny tots to arrive at day care wearing black and gold.

But the Donahues know how to get their revenge.

Once, they dressed up Xander in purple and black, then e-mailed a photo to Chad at work.

Whenever the Geists are around, the Donahues also enjoy pointing to an autographed framed photo of Ravens linebacker Bart Scott sacking Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

"We walked in and said 'Oh, is that for us?'" Kelli Geist said.

The two families have been contemplating what to do if their beloved team wins today.

Kelli Geist said she is considering bringing in wide receiver Hines Ward jerseys for the Donahues to wear if the Steelers prevail.

Jeff Donahue joked that he might have to charge more to have his wife take care of Steelers fans in the future.

"Twenty percent more," Donahue said, "if the Steelers win."

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