



**Ep. 19: Dan Liburd (SAR'06) Brooklyn Nets
Head Strength & Conditioning Coach**

Host: Jeff Murphy (Questrom'06), BU Alumni Relations

Not many resume's include experience with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Buffalo Bills and the Brooklyn Nets but after chatting with Dan Liburd (SAR'06), you'll quickly hear how it all adds up. As the Head Strength & Conditioning Coach for the Brooklyn Nets, Dan spends his days ensuring his colleagues, who just happen to be some of the world's most elite athletes, are able to maintain their peak performance. On this episode of the podcast, Dan talks about his experience working in both the NFL and NBA as well as the lessons he learned from remarkable mentors along the way.

Podcast Transcript:

Jeff Murphy: I'm Jeff Murphy from Boston University Alumni Relations, and I'm your host for an interview series showcasing the career paths of our most interesting and accomplished alumni. Welcome to the Proud to BU podcast.

Jeff Murphy: My guest today is the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Brooklyn Nets, Dan Liburd. Dan completed his degree in Exercise Science at BU's Sargent College in the class of 2006. Since then, Dan's garnered extensive experience working with elite athletes for the Buffalo Bills and Pittsburgh Steelers, before assuming his current role in the NBA. Dan sat down with me on the podcast to talk about following his passion, choosing to continue his education and the importance of finding mentors along the way.

Jeff Murphy: Well, Dan, I'm a lifelong basketball fan and I'm super excited to have you on the podcast. Thanks for joining us.

Dan Liburd: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Jeff Murphy: And you're currently the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Brooklyn Nets.

Dan Liburd: That's correct.

Jeff Murphy: And if I have my info straight, you actually grew up in New York, right?

Dan Liburd: I did. I spent much of my formative years in the Brooklyn and Long Island area.

Jeff Murphy: So you grew up in Brooklyn. And I think people from the outside as a knowing you're a Sargent College grad might think that this is just literally a dream job for you.

Dan Liburd: Without question. For many reasons other than the fact that it's in my hometown, the opportunity to follow something that's very, very much based in what I studied during my time at BU and what I grew up sort of aspiring to be. It's in many ways a dream come true.

Jeff Murphy: Well, I owe a debt of gratitude to our fellow alum and friend Alejandro Garcia Amaya who introduced me to you. And I had a chance- you are on his podcast, It's called Getting Here. We actually interviewed Alejandro in Episode 14 of Proud to BU. But I feel like I know quite a bit about you, so I know, I believe you just, you grew up as an athlete in Brooklyn. And so it's always kinda been a passion of yours, right?

Dan Liburd: Yeah, without question. I'd probably say during my time as a wrestler, playing football, running track, a lot of these events, there was always an event that I always want to be part of in relation to sort of being active, and within any sort of competitive environment as it relates to exercise. It was always something that was very important to me from an early age. I just found it to be really sort of invigorating. I found it to be, I had a very, very good attraction to it. And yeah, it continued and it continues at this moment. So it's something that I aim to do on a regular basis.

Jeff Murphy: At what point did you know that you could be in athletics and strength and conditioning as a career? Was it before BU? I'm guessing as an athlete, as a kid, you might've been exposed to people who worked in that field.

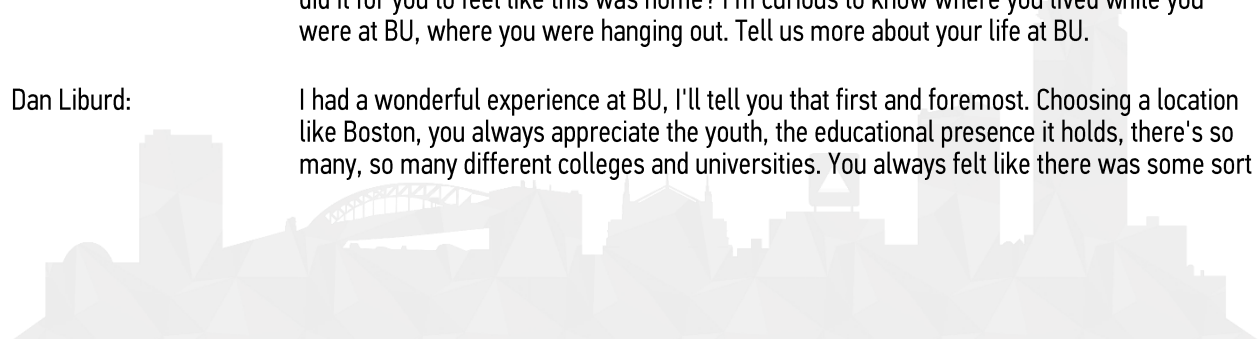
Dan Liburd: Yeah. You know, that's an interesting question. It's funny it was actually before I applied to BU, that I discovered that you could study exercise. I'll never forget, I was in my room and I was watching this show called Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel, and he had entertained a guest who, the idea of studying exercise or studying sports never really seemed feasible to me. It just never seemed like a concept that people would do it's just like how could you enjoy the sport and also understand all of it and try and aim to do that as a profession. And it wasn't until I saw one of his guests who did just that. I believe it was a female athlete and she was studying Exercise Science at her college and that was the first moment. I won't say it was a single moment that really sort of drove me in that direction. But it was one of the more poignant moments in my life that I realized that this was somewhat of a possibility. And that continued to be sort of strengthened as I continued through my career.

Jeff Murphy: I think a lot of people know that Sargent College is in many ways, top five, if not the number one school for, I think they're the number one for Occupational Therapy, but certainly one of the top ranked programs. How did you decide to come to BU from New York?

Dan Liburd: Oh, you know, that's another one. That's another fun one. I had actually never been to Boston. But I would take these somewhat quizzes that would provide, I don't know if you're aware that there was some during these college applications, you'd have this opportunity to take these quizzes that sort of placed you in different areas and gave you an idea of what would be a best fit for you based off your interests. And for whatever reason, BU always came up to be top three for me. I realized that that was an opportunity that would be a great opportunity for me. I love the city and that was one of the reasons why I decided to choose BU. And then I learned about the exercise program at Sargent and that confirmed my decision to go to that program and then entertain BU.

Speaker 2: So I certainly want to talk about your academic experience at BU, but I also love talking to our guests just about their life at BU. When you got here as a first year student, how long did it for you to feel like this was home? I'm curious to know where you lived while you were at BU, where you were hanging out. Tell us more about your life at BU.

Dan Liburd: I had a wonderful experience at BU, I'll tell you that first and foremost. Choosing a location like Boston, you always appreciate the youth, the educational presence it holds, there's so many, so many different colleges and universities. You always felt like there was some sort



of resource that you weren't taking advantage of. And I love that. I lived on West campus, Rich Hall, that was during my first two years and then I ventured out onto Commonwealth and then ended up on, we call Student Village "StuVi", so those were the locations that I ended up taking advantage of later through my years.

Jeff Murphy: You must've been one of the first groups of students that got to live in the Student Village.

Dan Liburd: Oh yeah, yeah. We had a, I'll never forget, my roommates and I had a beautiful view of the Charles River. And I remember it was remarked as like, I don't know that I'll ever have an apartment just as gorgeous as this later in my life. So it's pretty interesting.

Jeff Murphy: I've said that to every student I've ever run into who's lived at the Student Village, that enjoy it while you can.

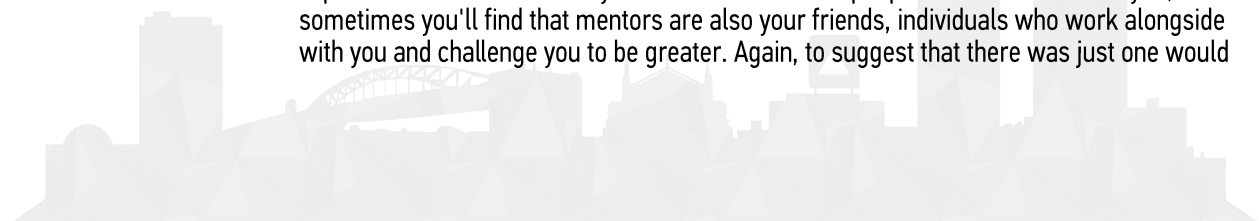
Dan Liburd: Take advantage, yeah.

Jeff Murphy: What were you doing for fun? Where were you hanging out? I imagine maybe you got involved in some student groups around exercise science and training or no?

Dan Liburd: Yeah there was many. There were many. There are many programs that we're doing right now, one of which was, taking part at FitRec. I was a trainer there. Yeah, we formed a group called the Agganis Strength Guys. There were a number of programs related to strength training that I was really sort of always investigating. And it began at Rich Hall. It began on West campus and extended into BU's Strength and Conditioning. And then that's probably one of the more influential moments that I can remember was walking into the BU Strength Room and seeing a number of individuals taking part in training and also really sort of improving their potential and their performance potential.

Jeff Murphy: One of the things we talk about on this podcast a lot is mentorship and the important role that's played for so many people. And again, I know from listening to your interview with Alejandro on his Getting Here podcast, you had some really impactful mentors while you were here at BU. Can you talk about those a little bit?

Dan Liburd: Oh, absolutely. Yeah man, its unfortunate to say, I feel as if I wouldn't be able to really encapsulate the number of mentors. I feel if I was to just talk about one or two, it would be unfair to many of the others. Some of them were students, some of them were professors. I will, however, I'll try to do that with and also tell you and just preface it with the fact that there were a number of individuals. First without question would be Mike Boyle. And surprisingly my experiences with Mike Boyle- Mike Boyle is one of the foremost, respected strength conditioning coaches in the world, and he happened to be at the time the Boston University strength and conditioning coach for the hockey team. And it wasn't until after I graduated that I had an opportunity to intern with him and learn under his guidance. He was really a very powerful force in sort of helping me to develop into the strength coach that I am today. But there are a number of others. Glenn Harris, who is another strength coach, that was my first strength conditioning experience. He was a strength coach at BU. Some of the professors, my bio-mechanics professor who really sort of challenged me, but also provided me some really good resources, educational resources that only serve to really sort of promote my interest in the field. Those were really, really important figures to me. And then of course, the number of athletes, individuals that I had a chance to gain an experience with. Sometimes you think of mentors as people who are older than you, but sometimes you'll find that mentors are also your friends, individuals who work alongside with you and challenge you to be greater. Again, to suggest that there was just one would



be unfair to many of the others, but just those are just some of the names. I have to mention Big Brown and Darcy as well. Those were two fellow strength coaches who worked alongside Glenn Harris at the time, who are big time strength coaches now.

Jeff Murphy: And I know you have some real world experiences while you were a student at BU, you were working professionally as a trainer after finishing your degree here. And I know that you also just got some advice about grad school. Talk to us about that decision to continue on with your education and why you felt that was important for what you wanted to achieve in your career?

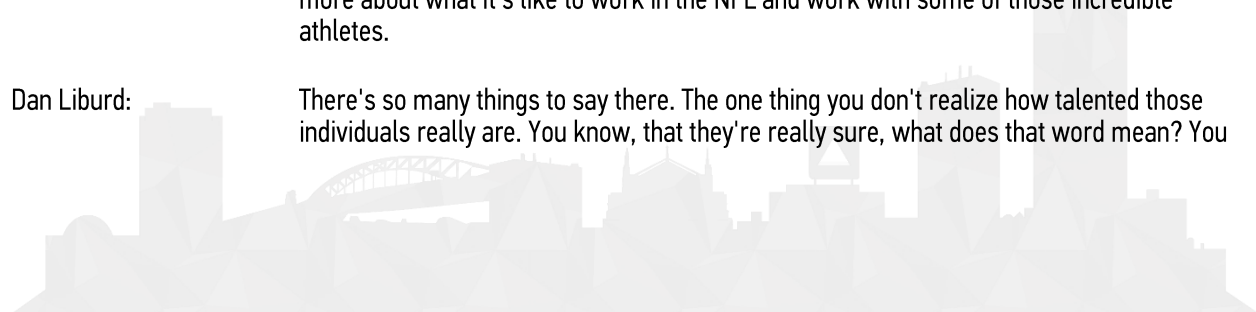
Dan Liburd: Oh, wow. What a great question. You realize once you step into this field, and maybe every other field I'm beginning to realize, that this pursuit of knowledge is so intrinsic for success and for growth in the field. I didn't realize just how important that was at the time. I knew there was importance to it, but I was so interested in just getting into the field and really sort of going through my experiences before realizing that gaining your experience is also gaining knowledge at the same time. You have to do those and they have to compliment each other. It was again, one of my mentors, Mike Boyle, after my experience with him, working it out in his facility, which at the time was at Winchester, Massachusetts. This is postgraduate or post-undergraduate, he came up to me and I asked him, Hey, you know what, we just finished this really great internship. I want to do more. I want to go up through the ranks. And he sat me down and he said, the next step for you has to be grad school. In this field, you can't get any farther without going through that type of learning experience. You have to go through a graduate program. And that provided, that was it. He taught me so much and I felt that that was the next step for me. He ended up being one of the individuals who provided a recommendation letter for me. And then I continued from there.

Jeff Murphy: And then if I've got my facts straight, you go basically right from graduating with your master's, right into working in the top level of professional sports. You went right into the NFL with the Buffalo Bills. Is that unusual that somebody so young and just right out of grad school would go right to the pro level?

Dan Liburd: I would probably say I don't know that it is exceptional. It is unusual. But when you look, I think, at some of the connections between the time I went to Springfield, Springfield College is a graduate program. It is, the connections that you have along that area along with a number of schools there to individuals within the NFL is vast. So when you look at those connections, it doesn't seem as exceptional. But you do realize that they are searching for young individuals that they can sort of imprint their philosophy upon. I think it becomes more challenging once you start gaining knowledge from different sects of the strength and conditioning world. So, yeah, they are looking for young individuals to come in and to learn and to practice and preach the philosophy that they instill and they being the experts in that professional sort of realm. And I had the opportunity to be one of those young minds that they really wanted to provide knowledge to and really drive their philosophy through. And I was fortunate enough to work alongside some really good individuals.

Jeff Murphy: I'm curious to know just what it feels like to want to work in this field and then find yourself working with, again, the top performing athletes in their sport. And what are those sort of lessons that you learn joining an NFL franchise about work ethic, and if you could just tell us more about what it's like to work in the NFL and work with some of those incredible athletes.

Dan Liburd: There's so many things to say there. The one thing you don't realize how talented those individuals really are. You know, that they're really sure, what does that word mean? You



know, it means that they're an expert in this one particular area. But you don't realize that that's just one aspect of what they do. The other is that they have talents outside, off the field. That they're very aware of what's going on. It's not just about the sports. And then also, again, you mentioned the work ethic. Football. Oh, wow. I don't think there are many sports that really test, teach, and really sort of drive work ethic. Football is, it's a sport that really does that to a powerful degree. I think many, many athletes can attest to the fact that waking up, sometimes at 4:00 AM, 5:00 AM, for early morning lifts, followed by meetings, followed by more meetings, followed by practice. And then post-lift conditioning, followed by meetings again. You realize just how extensive ones they can be. And it starts early on and nowadays they're asking to do more. So to see what those guys go through really helped shape my work ethic and I'm glad to have been part of that and to have learned under many of those coaches and also athletes. We really push not only their bodies, but their work ethic through limitless balance. It was a powerful experience for me.

Jeff Murphy: So you were with the Bills for, I think, eight years and then eventually moved over to the Steelers. Was that a decision you made or was there like a coaching regime change? It's interesting when you're tied to a professional team like that. So many things about your career in ways out of your control. So I'm curious to know how you've navigated from team to team.

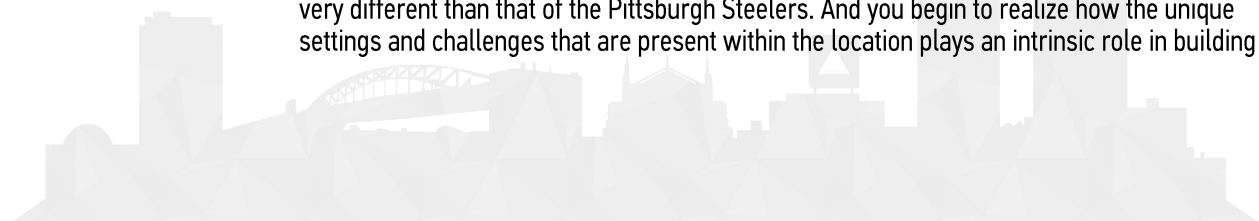
Dan Liburd: Yeah. So I was fortunate to have survived I think five head coaching changes during my time with the Buffalo Bills from 2009 to 2016. Unfortunately my last head coach happened to be Rex Ryan and entering that transition from Rex Ryan to Coach Sean McDermott. You're always looking to sort of explore opportunities and improve your ability to work up the ranks. And for me, that meant really sort of exploring other opportunities and the Pittsburgh Steelers offered me one. And that's something that I don't regret doing. It was an opportunity to see a different type of culture, work under one of my most, one of the leaders for me in the industry, Mike Tomlin. Another opportunity to work under a powerful and very successful head coach. It was, the decision for me to go there, it was very easy and I decided to take advantage of that opportunity and it worked out well for me. Having an opportunity to navigate from different regimes in football is difficult. It's a challenge. But you do it to learn and you do it to survive and grow in the field.

Jeff Murphy: And then you had a chance to head home and work for the Brooklyn Nets. I'm curious to know if there's a big difference in culture between the NBA and the NFL.

Dan Liburd: Yeah, yeah. Yes and no. So again, you talk about work ethic, that there is, there's so many other different challenges in the NBA.

Jeff Murphy: Just the pure number of games, the constant travel.

Dan Liburd: Absolutely. Absolutely. Those things come into, those factors really sort of change. The dynamics, we're not waking up at 6:00 AM, but at the same time we're also getting in at 3:00 AM 2:00 AM, and we're trying to navigate between the various stressors that these athletes go through and attempting to do our best for film, recovery, various types of lifts. So there is, of course, an understanding of culture and how culture plays into winning. There's a central focus there for sure. And that's similar I think across all sports. But at the same time, the challenges are very different. And that's not just within, NBA to the NFL. One of the things that I remember was just how vastly different the culture was from team to team in the NFL. My experiences in terms of regarding culture, within the Buffalo Bills is very different than that of the Pittsburgh Steelers. And you begin to realize how the unique settings and challenges that are present within the location plays an intrinsic role in building



that culture for the team and how different they can be. That was remarkable for me. Cultures are going to be different no matter what team and what sport you play and you have got to respect it. And then at the same time you'll see some similarities as well.

Jeff Murphy: I often like to ask people what outsiders, people who don't work in their industry, misunderstand about their title and their role. So as the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach. What do people not know about your job? And I'm also curious how that, how you're evaluated, how does the team decide whether or not you've been successful in your job?

Dan Liburd: That's a tough question. A question we talk about as strength coaches all the time is, how do you evaluate a performance group? The old adage is to look at injury reports and number of games missed. Unfortunately, that doesn't paint a very comprehensive picture of how effective a performance staff or performance coach can be. What I will say though is one of the things that people do misunderstand about a head strength coach is just how many hats they hold. It isn't simply fixated or relegated, I should say, to the performance realm. They also play a role in shaping, being mentors to the athletes, providing schedule changes. There's so many different aspects that take place and strength coaches will really sort of, argue or show you or demonstrate that it's not just within the weight room. Sometimes they're more powerful outside the weight room. Things they do from an organizational standpoint, from an administrative standpoint. And it's different. Every coach, every culture has a different need. And you'll notice that there's a lot of hands and then they wear a lot of hats I should say. That's always the one conclusion you come to is strength coaches wear a lot of hats in the profession. And rightly so, you're with the athletes for an extended period. You want to make sure your driving goal is to always take care of the athlete as best as you can. And you realize that it's not only done within weight room but outside of the weight room as well.

Jeff Murphy: As a sports fan myself, there's just a ton of questions I want to ask you, like inside baseball about who your favorite athletes are. But let me ask this. Do you have a particular success story that you could share with us about working with a particular athlete? Whether you can name them or not is fine, but that you sort of reflect on and think like, wow, I really made an impact and helped the team.

Dan Liburd: Oh man, one success story would be tough. I would say that developing the relationships and the carryover. I've kept in touch now with athletes now who, these days, I still keep in touch with, that's a success story to me. In fact, last night we just played in San Antonio, and last night I found that a lot of my former athletes are now in a different league, American Alliance of Football. And I invited them. I found that a couple, one tight end, one running back that I used to work with. And having the opportunity to be able to hold those conversations, to communicate, for them to have a stake and interest in my life. That to me is success. You realize outside of all of this, I'm sure we'll want, we're trying to win games or trying as best to protect them from injury and trying to improve the potential. But the other aspect is really creating these powerful moments, these really good relationships. And if I was to describe success, it's the great relationships I do have now and I continue to have with a lot of these players. That was, you know, it's demonstrated on a regular basis. Last night, the most, the one that I can recall was the one that took place last night. Trey Williams, Evan Rodrigues and Cyril Richardson, these are three athletes that I've had a chance to, I've worked with. I've had success stories, during our time in Buffalo, Trey Williams was with the Pittsburgh Steelers and Evan was with the Buffalo Bills. We shared stories last night and here they are, all three of them playing together in a different league. And I just happened to get in touch with all of them and invite them to a Spurs game. I've never been into a San Antonio Spurs game and I'm a strength coach now in the NBA. So it's



a wild story but I think the point is out of everything it's how well of a relationship you can develop with them and, and how great that can be.

Jeff Murphy: You laid out pretty clearly the importance of the academic aspect of what you're doing. You also talked about the importance of the people that you've learned from along the way. When people find out what you do for work and they tell you, oh man, I want to be a strength and conditioning coach. Outside of the academics, outside of the networking, what are the other characteristics, the other skills that you tell people they really need to focus on in order to be successful in that field?

Dan Liburd: Oh my God, what a good question. And I want to, it's a question I get all the time. And I'll tell you right now, if this is an interest for you, then the next step for you is to read. It is to read, read, read, read the research. There is research after research coming in. This is a growing, very competitive field. And during the times that I'm not training, I'm wishing that I could read the latest research. I'm spending days where I'm constantly trying to balance between my work life, my family life, and also catching up on reading. It is a field that demands respect for understanding the literature, the bias of research, all the intrinsic aspects of research, uh, and, the latest developments. Things are changing, things are growing. There's quite a bit of innovation taking place in the field. If you have a passion for this, sure you've got a passion for exercise, but you also have a passion for reading and learning. And that would be my recommendation for anyone in the field I'm in. At the moment, I'm still considering, I've already had a lot of schooling and yet I'm still considering ways that I can facilitate my own growth through schooling. I'm doing a Ph.D., and yet I feel that that isn't enough for me. To really sort of sustain myself in the field, it's gotta be more. And you realize that as you continue, and rightly so, to provide the best care you have to stay up to date with the latest research.

Jeff Murphy: Yeah. I saw on your LinkedIn that you were working on a Ph.D. And I'm curious, where are you, where do you see that taking you? What lies ahead for you in your professional goals? Because so many people I think would think that you're already at the top of your field.

Dan Liburd: Uh, no, I think, again, I don't know that, it's a Ph.D. sure, it's just another opportunity to really sort of test and really sort of assess how well you're doing and gaining information and using that information appropriately. I don't think there is a top, I think you just continue going and developing. So I think the next step, I imagine if you were to ask me in 10 years, I think it'd be something else that I'd be doing that that's also sort of an educational driver. It just happens to be a program that I can use, I can do at this moment in my life while also working in sports. It's always going to be an important piece for me. So those two things have to be respected for sure.

Jeff Murphy: Well, Dan, this was a great interview. Thanks so much for carving out time. I was really excited to have a chance to talk to you.

Dan Liburd: Of course. Thank you.

Jeff Murphy: Thanks again to Dan for joining me on the podcast. I really enjoyed getting a chance to chat with him and I admire his ability to combine his passion for Pro Sports with the education he received at BU. If you'd like to connect with Dan, I encourage you to reach out to him on LinkedIn.

Jeff Murphy: Thanks again for listening to the Proud to BU podcast. If you like what we're doing, please be sure to subscribe, rate, and review Proud to BU wherever you download your episodes.



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