



All the Best Podcast
Episode 42: NFLer Brennan Scarlet and the "Big Yard"
Featuring Houston Texans' Linebacker, Brennan Scarlet

Brennan: August 10th, 1989. Barbara and I decided that when the war was over, we would strike out on our own in a new and different part of the country. After graduating from Yale in June, 1948, I heeded Horace Greeley's advice and went west to Odessa, Texas. When I was told of my assignment to Odessa, I'd never heard of the town and didn't know what part of Texas it was in. Besides raising our infant son, we were determined to learn the customs and ways of our new home and become part of the community. We've learned to adjust to football fever, which overtakes West Texas from September to November. Observing a game between Odessa and Midland is a total experience in itself. It was that hot summer in autumn of 1948, living in that shotgun house on 1319 East 7th street, that we went through the rites of passage from being newcomers to becoming part of the community. At Odessa, we became Texas and proud of it.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is "All the Best."

Brennan Scarlett is currently an outside linebacker for the Houston Texans, a team near and dear to my grandparent's heart. In the 2019 season, Brennan recorded career highs in snaps, tackles and sacks over 15 games. Off the field, Brennan is devoted to community empowerment. He is the founder and president of Big Yard, a foundation that seeks to promote access to arts, physical wellness, creativity, and literacy. Welcome, Brennan, how are you, man?

Brennan: I'm doing well, Sam. I appreciate you for having me.

Sam: Well, before we dive into your career and your charitable work, let's start with life in general. How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect an NFL player when it comes to off season training? We saw Tom Brady got into trouble for trying to work out at a park in Florida. How have you coped?

Brennan: In our business, it's been affected a lot like some other businesses, you know, it's just a totally different landscape, different experience. You know, right now I'm in Portland, Oregon with my family. I've been here for the past couple months now and I would, in a normal year, be back in Houston with the team, but unfortunately that's not happening. So luckily for me, I have access to a gym and I have a group of guys who are also in the league and really competitive and trying to get better. But man, there's a lot of guys out there who they're trying to make it work with driveway workouts, and it's just a weird time, but I think it's more so that the team camaraderie that you create during this time where you get to know your teammates and the new free agents and the rookies, and this is all stuff that's pretty difficult to do over Zoom. And you know, I think that's the part that really suffers.

Sam: Okay, well, I have two questions about the NFL draft. First, this year's draft was all done virtually, but still broke all kinds of TV viewing records. What does that say to you about the hunger we all have for live sports of any kind and the fundamental role sports plays in our society?

Brennan: I think sports and athletics is something that ties together, different cultures and backgrounds, and you end up cheering for the same team and we all

share the human story that comes to show itself in an athlete's pursuit of the American dream. And so not having that during this time is really unfortunate. You know, my brother being his rookie year, he's this close to realizing his lifelong goal and just by happenstance, his first year falls on the year of COVID-19, it's really unfortunate. And I just hope that things get figured out and we figure out a way to keep us all safe, but at the same time, get out there and play some ball.

Sam: Well, my second question about the draft centers around the fact that you were undrafted, yet here you are five seasons later coming off your best season and killing it in the NFL. Can you talk about the motivation you draw from that 2016 draft experience and what message that sends to other kids out there with a dream like your brother?

Brennan: You know, being an undrafted guy, that's a chip that you carry on your shoulder for your whole career. Every year as I watched the draft, it just reminds me of, you know, that feeling of watching the 253 players, I think it was my year, that got chosen. Me not being one of those people, that sticks with me even this year, seeing the draft happen and having that hunger to want to go work out, you know, that day. As far as relating it to kids and people in general, not even just in football, but trying to chase their dreams. I think the gift is in the journey. So I think being grateful for that is also something I would tell a young whipper snapper to think about.

Sam: I want to ask one more NFL question because not everyone has the experience of playing in the NFL. Can you share some of your memorable moments thus far?

Brennan: You know, I remember my rookie year, I had a hamstring injury early in the season and they put me on injured reserve. So I ended up sitting out weeks 5 through week 14. And that year you were able to pull back one player off of injury reserve. And, you know, I was a rookie and had shown some promise and we had some guys in my position that were a little banged up and come week 14 they decided to pull me back up onto the active roster. And I got to go in and play some meaningful football games in December, you know, and the outcome of these games matter. And then to go into playoffs and be a part of that, taking on a role and feeling, you know, a sense of pride being brought back and wanting to play my best for the team. That's one of my best memories.

Sam: That's pretty nice. So Brennan, the main theme we have here on "All the Best" is service, and you clearly share that drive through your Big Yard

foundation. For starters, what led you to want to start the Big Yard foundation and can you tell us how your foundation got its name?

Brennan: I'm from Portland, Oregon. I grew up in specifically North Portland. Then I moved on to Cal for University of California, Berkeley for four years, and then spent a year at Stanford. And so when I was growing up here in North Portland, North Portland was where the predominantly black and brown populations was. It was a very small, tight knit community. And upon my years of going to college and coming back, I'd come back for a weekend and I'd see these new apartment buildings. And I'd see, you know, these new restaurants and the place is really sprucing up. And you know, it's like, wow, these are great changes. And then, you know, after some years, and I start to come back, the community that I really grew up with had begun to disperse. They got priced out, whether it was because of property tax or rent or lack of ownership or whatever it was, there wasn't that tight knit community that I grew up with in the same place.

And so I think your home is something that should stay consistent, you know, your family and your friends and your home that should stay consistent. And so the Big Yard was founded with the intention to empower communities, to unify and really stay put. Cause you know, there's all types of reasons why gentrification and displacement of communities happens, but we chose to address it through literacy, physical wellness and creativity. And your second question on how Big Yard got its name, my dad is from Cousins Cove, Jamaica. He was born in 1963, he's the oldest of five. So when he was six years old, his dad, my grandfather, Harry Scarlett left to Toronto. You know, he's a very inspired entrepreneurial man and wanted the most for his family. And he didn't feel like the educational opportunities in Jamaica were quite up to the standard that he wanted for his kids.

And so he left in 1969, left, Jamaica went to Toronto, granted four of the five kids were born and his wife were back in Jamaica still. Two years, past 1971 comes, he worked in the mines and he worked all these odd jobs. He raised enough money to get his wife over, my grandma. So my grandma's in Toronto. There are four kids still back in Cousins Cove, Jamaica. And in this community that they grew up in, they call it the Big Yard until this day, call it Big Yard. So basically you got four kids with no parents living in a community and what happened, it was up to the friends and the families and the people that surrounded my dad and his siblings to support them. That's really the inspiration for the name. The cliché saying is that it takes a village. And so from our kids to adults and to just community members, period, I think that when the community is together and unified, I think you can do

so much more for everyone just as the big yard community did for my father and his siblings.

Sam: Well, you mentioned earlier, one of the ways you support community empowerment at the Big Yard foundation is by focusing on literacy rate and access to books. I can tell you, my grandmother would definitely approve. What led you to want to focus part of your energy on literacy and what effect is it having?

Brennan: So, crazy enough, The Barbara Bush foundation really inspire a lot of what we do. I was a part of a couple of book fairs with the Barbara Bush Foundation and I just saw how, you know, it brightened a kid's day. And, you know, it took me back to like Scholastic book fairs back in the day and you show up and you got these fresh books that make the little crackle sound as you peel them open, you know, and just the feeling that that brought to me as a kid and I saw it with the Barbara Bush Foundation, you know, the spark and excitement and reading that that can give, you know, that and my personal love of reading.

I think about how my love of reading has helped my communication and critical thinking and you know, my writing and all of these things that are really critical pieces in life. That's kind of what really sparked that initiative.

Sam: So we've talked about all the great things you do at Big Yard. If you had a magic wand or were the king of the universe, and you had the ultimate authority to fix one problem in society, what would it be?

Brennan: First, if we're just talking about today, like, all right, we might need to get rid of COVID-19, but, I would say in normal circumstances, literacy and access to education, you know, especially in this country, but all around the world. If everyone could have access to a quality education. If I was king of the universe, that's what I would address.

Sam: Maybe one day you'll be king of the universe. Now let me ask you this. Not many people listening today know you also have a second career as the host of BScar TV. Can you tell us about BScar TV and how you're going to take over the airwaves?

Brennan: I started messing around with a camera and creating some digital content just as like a creative outlet. And I also love being in front of a camera. I can relate the feelings similar to playing sports and performing in front of thousands of people. You know, when I'm on camera, I kind of get a similar feeling like it's a

performance, you know, and the ability to use your creativity and also your personality and take pieces of Will Smith and Denzel, like in the same way that I might take a little bit of JJ Watt's game and Whitney Mercilus's game and weave it all together.

There's just a lot of similarities. So that's kind of how BScar TV got started and this past year we did a "play a reporter" in the locker room. We asked my teammates funny questions and really try to pull their personalities out. Cause you know, sometimes, you know, when the media asks questions, we like to stiffen up a little bit, it's going to be straight forward. So part of what we try to do on BScar TV is just, you know, allow guys to be themselves and get the fans to get another side, you know, understand who they really are off the field

Sam: Brennan. I really appreciate it. I want to end with this. You know, you're doing such great things with the Big Yard foundation, for anybody who's looking to help or do something to make a difference in their community, wherever it may be, what advice would you have for them getting started and making that dream happen?

Brennan: You just got to do it. And I think this for a lot of different aspects of life, whether it's business or kind of any idea that you might have, you just got to do it. There's a lot of fear that's born out of having this grand vision. But I mean, it's the old adage that Rome isn't built in a day. If you're looking to make a difference, you know, whether that's in the Big Yard format, you're throwing a Dodgeball tournament or book fairs, or you're just taking meals to the homeless, whatever that is. I think it's important to really do it. And then, you know, you make some tweaks along the way and someday if you keep persevering and putting the proper work in, you'll be at that grand vision that you have and you'll change the world.

Sam: Well, Brennan, it seems like you've already changed the world and are going to keep changing it so I appreciate you coming on to All the Best and go Texans.

Brennan: Go, Texas. Thanks Sam. I appreciate you for having me.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.