

Interview with Charlie Biggurs

Note: Charlie Biggurs was an offensive tackle at Tech on the 1989 thru '92 teams, three years as a starter. A co-captain on the '92 team, he earned All-Southwest Conference honors twice. Since graduating in 1994, he has accomplished things most people take a lifetime to do through his work in the NFL and in the ministry. I hadn't seen him in eight or nine years, so it was a thrill to catch up with him.

Mike: Tell us where you've been and what you've been doing since you walked off the field in '92.

Charlie: I finished playing in '92 then worked as a student assistant in the Texas Tech weight room with Joe Juraszek and Meg Ritchie until I finished my degree a year later. I left Lubbock and went to Oklahoma with Joe to work as an assistant strength and conditioning coach for two years. While I was in Oklahoma, I had a change in my life and went in to the ministry. The reason we left Oklahoma is I was getting farther involved in the ministry and my father-in-law is a pastor in a church in Tyler. We went there to learn and to minister and to do things at his church with him so I could learn the ministry. One day after about 16 or 17 months in Tyler, Joe talked to Coach (Barry) Switzer who was then the Dallas Cowboys head coach. The Cowboys had an opening in the weight room and wanted Joe. He called me and asked if I was interested in being his assistant. It went from "he wants to know in a couple weeks" to "Coach Switzer wants you to clear your calendar on Thursday, so you can drive to Dallas for an interview." On Thursday evening, we walked out of there hired by the Dallas Cowboys.

Mike: So you and he interviewed at the same time?

Charlie: We sat at the same table at the same time with Jerry Jones, Barry Switzer, the athletic training staff and a couple other coaches. We went in together, and they interviewed Joe for a while and then came to me and asked me what I brought to the table as Joe's assistant. It was a wonderful experience. I returned to Dallas about a week or so later with my family, and the rest is history.

Mike: So you were the assistant strength coach at Dallas for a while, but I remember a conversation I had with Joe in which he told me you were attending classes at a seminary at night.

Charlie: Yes, I started seminary immediately after we moved to Dallas. I switched schools about half way through, but I took classes at night, on the weekends and by correspondence for a few years until I finally finished.

Mike: Did you then commit full time to the ministry and leave the weight room?

Charlie: I left the Cowboys strength and conditioning staff in 2000 to work with a ministry called the John Jacobs and the Power Team. It's an evangelistic ministry. It's actually a group of ex-athletes – guys who have done power lifting, football, basketball or

whatever, and what they do is travel the world and go to churches and schools. I was the pastor for the ministry. Because those guys traveled all the time and were on the road a week and off the road a couple days and then back on the road, I was the grounding force for them back in Dallas. I helped them when they were home and assisted with their families while they were on the road, plus helped with the office duties. The great thing about it was when I left the Cowboys, the Lord had given me favor with many of the players and with Coach Switzer, Coach (Chan) Gailey, Coach (Dave) Campo and the Jerry Jones family. Even though I was no longer working in the weight room, the Cowboys asked me to come around and continue to help with the Bible Studies and some of the other things I had begun to do when I was working there as a strength coach. I still had an open door with the team, and even though I'm no longer a coach on the staff, I still have full access to the team. A guy named John Webber has been one of the team chaplains with the Cowboys since Coach (Tom) Landry was there. John and I formed a great relationship. Now I handle a lot of the things with the players, and John handles a lot of the things with the staff and other members of the organization. We do Coach's Bible Studies and other stuff. When I left the strength staff, I was hoping the door to the team wouldn't close to me and now the door is probably opened wider to me.

Mike: I saw you on television a few times and became aware of your involvement and your relationship with Deion Sanders at a time when he was very public about a big change in his life. Is there anything you'd like to say about that?

Charlie: Oh yeah. Deion and I are great friends. We actually met in church. I was at a church service one night, and we just happened to sit next to each other. This is when Joe and I had just been hired. Deion and I didn't know each other as "Coach Biggurs" and Deion from the weight room yet. I said, "Hey, I'm the new assistant strength coach with team. I was just hired a week or so ago," and we really hit it off. Deion began to have Bible studies at his house, and I helped facilitate those and get the guys to attend, and through that he and I have formed a great relationship. Now our kids fish and ride four-wheelers and hang out. Again, that's just been another great relationship that I've been blessed with, and it came out of sitting next to him at church one night.

Mike: You've talked about the Cowboys, but you've also got a church that you're starting and building. Where are you now?

Charlie: We actually started a church (Abundant Grace Christian Center) in Irving, and in October it will be five years old. We started meeting at our house and then moved to a YMCA in Coppell. We stayed there for a couple years and now we're meeting at a community center in the part of town where we plan to build our church. We've been there almost a year, and now we're in the process of looking at construction. Joe (Juraszek) and I have talked several times that whenever you start something from grass roots you have to pour your life into it to make it work. When he came to Tech, the facilities were old and he was starting a new program as the Athletic Training Center was being built. He poured his life into our strength program at Tech to get it going, and that's where we're at with our church. We currently have a small congregation that's steadily

growing each week, and now we're in the process of buying some land and hopefully by the beginning of 2005 we'll start construction on our first building.

Mike: Tell me what it means now and what it meant to you as an athlete at Tech to be with Joe Juraszek who was such a special person to every athletic program here in those days, because he worked with every sport.

Charlie: Joe was never a coach to us – he was always our big brother. In fact, when I call him now and talk to him or leave a message, I refer to him as “Big Brother.” That’s what it was with him. I was an 18 year-old kid running wild in Houston. At Tech, this guy from South Chicago who had also “been there and done that,” tried to steer me in the right direction through football and weight lifting. I can’t even begin to tell you the level of love that we have for one another. It’s unbelievable how we bonded from day one, and it seems like the bond has gotten stronger and stronger and stronger. He has always been there. Out of all the guys he could have called when he got the break of his lifetime with the Cowboys, he brought me in. After three years, I told him I was going in a different direction, and he’s been supportive of anything I’ve done. I’ve watched his kids grow up. Camille, his wife, still has us over for chicken parmesan. I love him. It never was a coach relationship with me and him – it was always a big brother relationship.

Mike: I was an athlete under Joe, and later one of his assistants at Tech, working with you guys when you were playing, Joe always talked about how he didn't make the final decision and who played or who did what. He emphasized how he was here to help all of us, and that was a unique way in which he forged a relationship with us. He would coach us in the sense that he was the guy in charge, and he knew what was best to prepare us for our sport, but we also knew he was pulling for all of us.

Charlie: That was the thing that really impressed me about Joe from the first day I got here. Whether you were a walk-on or a scholarship athlete, a starter or a guy who'd never touch the field, if you wanted the help, he gave it to you. It didn't matter what you were doing, if you wanted to do some extra things at 5 in the morning to get better, he would bend over backwards for anybody who wanted that.

Mike: You just touched on a quality that Joe has, but that you also have. I want you to tell the story about the meeting you had with a walk-on teammate of yours years after you'd finished playing here.

Charlie: My wife was pregnant with our little girl and we were going for her monthly checkup. We were in the hospital parking garage in Dallas, and a guy walked up to us and asked me if my name was Charlie Biggurs. I told him yes and he asked if I had played football at Tech. Again, I told him yes, and I'm wondering who this guy is and my wife was wondering the same thing. He said, “You probably don't know me, but I was a walk-on when you played at Tech. I always dressed down the hall in the visitor's locker room. I never played, but I wanted to tell you that you were always a cool guy and a good dude to us walk-ons and I always appreciated that.” I still don't know his name, but that really meant a lot to me, because my wife got to hear somebody say that about me. Here

this guy is a walk-on who I didn't know, and he says that I treated him well and that I was always nice to him. For me that's a testimony for my life, because I've always wanted to be a guy who treated people right no matter what shape, form or fashion they were. I've always loved people and I believe that's why I'm a pastor now. No matter what walk of life you come from, I always try to treat people well and that's what Joe has always reinforced, as well.

Mike: You and Joe are like that, and to me that's what the "Scoreboard of Life" is all about. J.C. Watts said, "Character is doing what's right when nobody's watching," and to me that's what you had going on, only somebody was watching and remembered it 10 years later.

You were back on campus for the first time in 10 years for the 2004 Spring Game and that morning the ribbon was cut on a new football training facility. Plus, we're sitting in a suite in the new stadium club, all of which you saw for the first time. What do you think of all this?

Charlie: First of all, I'm thoroughly impressed and this is all well-deserved. A lot of times guys who play leave and come back and see that things are better and get kind of mad, like "why didn't we have that when we were here?" But you know, for the times, what we had was state of the art. Our ATC weight room was as good as anybody's, but that was in the late '80s and early '90s and now it's 2004. As I drove up to campus, I called my wife, who is also a Tech grad, and said, "Baby, you aren't going to believe this. This is wonderful!" I told her, "The Tech ghetto is gone" and she said, "Even my old apartment?" I said, "It's all gone and replaced by new buildings and parking garages and apartments. New stuff is being built all over the place." I drove up University by the stadium, and I was surrounded by the new buildings over there, the suites, the new stadium club, the new complex and it's not just athletic buildings. There are new buildings on campus, things are being refurbished, cleaned up and things are just growing. At 4th Street just north of the stadium is a new highway going in where we used to hang out at the car wash (on 4th & University). This is awesome! I'm glad to see that. My sons were with me and they'll be at Tech as soon as they graduate high school. It's state of the art, and it's wonderful, wonderful, wonderful and well-deserved. I told Coach (Gerald) Myers that he's done a wonderful job with all this.

Mike: That weekend you got to see Coach (Spike) Dykes, guys you played with and guys who coached you. What's it like to see all those faces again at these reunions?

Charlie: To see the new "slim and trim" Coach Dykes and know that he's taking care of his health is great. Just to see guys that you ran and lifted and won and lost with is great. You see them and meet their wives and their kids and know that they are doing well. That's wonderful to me because that's what it's all about – to come back home to Lubbock and see this new facility and stadium improvement and the plans for more, and that makes me glad to be back. I guarantee you it won't be another 10 years before I come back!

Mike: The last thing I want you to do is to tell those former Tech athletes who, like you, haven't returned to Tech why they need to get back here.

Charlie: They need to be back, because they had a part in what we're doing now. They need to support it, and be a part of this. It's good to come back and see older players like Tyrone Thurman and Jeff Keith and all those guys who were older than me. But they accept me because I was a part of the same thing they were. I think it would be wonderful for everyone who sees this article, if you're an athlete or just a former student at Tech, to haul your behind back here to Lubbock to see what's going in athletics and also what's going on with this great university. Who would have thought something like this could have been built out here in the middle of West Texas? Everyone needs to see Texas Tech.