

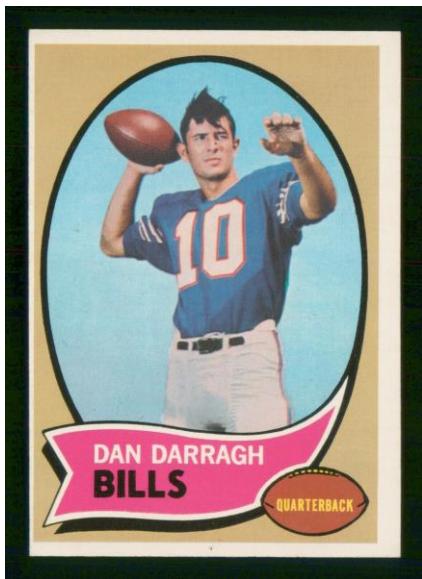


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## Dan Darragh

This article was written by Greg D. Tranter

Dan Darragh was a star college quarterback at William and Mary, starting for three years and breaking most of the school's all-time passing records. He had a three-year NFL career with the Buffalo Bills, starting half the team's games in his rookie season. His career was short-circuited by ankle and shoulder injuries leading to his retirement in 1971. Darragh became an effective attorney following his football career.



Daniel Meyer Darragh was born on November 28, 1946 in Pittsburgh, Pa. He grew up in Western Pennsylvania. Dan was the second eldest of six children. He attended South Hills Catholic High School (now Seton-LaSalle) in Mt. Lebanon. Western Pennsylvania is known for being a birthplace of star professional quarterbacks. Hall of Fame quarterbacks from the region include Jim Kelly, Dan Marino, Joe Montana, Joe Namath, and John Unitas.

Darragh was trying to make a name for himself in high school following in the footsteps of Namath and Unitas. As a junior quarterback in 1962, Darragh led South Hills Catholic to their first ever Catholic "AA" league title. The team went undefeated in league play, beating North 14-6, Central 19-13, Mon Valley 26-6 and Canevin 28-0. Its overall record was 6-2.



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Darragh's senior year, as co-captain of the team, was disappointing with only two returning starters from the 1962 championship squad. South Hill only won two games and tied one – although their tie was the only blemish on "AA" League Champion North Catholic's 9-0-1 record. Darragh scored South Hills' touchdown in the surprising tie game. Throughout the season he played quarterback and was the team's punter and in one game lofted an 80-yard punt. He made honorable mention All-State at the conclusion of the season. One of Darragh's high school teammates was Tom Donahoe, future General Manager of the Pittsburgh Steelers and President and General Manager of the Buffalo Bills.

Marv Levy, the new head coach at William and Mary, recruited Darragh for the Tribe. Dan matriculated to Williamsburg, Virginia in the fall of 1964.

Darragh in his sophomore year shared the quarterback duties with another sophomore, Mike Madden, for the Indians in Levy's second season as head coach. Dan helped lead William and Mary to Levy's first winning season at the helm, finishing with a 6-4 record. It was William and Mary's first winning season since 1953. Darragh shared reps with Madden, but was the team leader in all passing categories - attempts (126), completions (73), yardage (896) and TD's (8) with an outstanding 127.5 quarterback rating. Madden was the better runner and Darragh the superb passer with Madden finishing second on the team in rushing. Darragh was also the team's punter and did an excellent job. He led the Southern Conference in punting average at 41.7 yards per kick. He was named to the second team All-Southern Conference backfield.

One of the highlights of Darragh's sophomore season was a 21-0 victory over Richmond in the final game, clinching the team's winning record. Dan fired two touchdown passes and scored on a nine-yard run. He helped wide receiver George Pearce set Southern Conference records for most receptions (61) and yardage (796) in a season.

Another highlight for Darragh was his three touchdown passes in the second quarter against Davidson in leading the Indians to a 41-7 victory. "Darragh, an 18-year old sharpshooting quarterback from Mount Lebanon, PA, tossed scoring strikes to George Pearce, 31 yards to Steve Slotnick, and 34 yards to Dennis Haglan, to vault the Indians into a 28-0 halftime lead which never was threatened."<sup>i</sup>

Darragh became the starting quarterback from the beginning of his junior year in 1966, sharing only limited reps with Madden. Dan led the Indians to another winning season, finishing at 5-4-1. His statistics improved considerably with more playing time. He threw 227 passes, completing 111 for 1,346 yards and 14 touchdowns. He broke school records for attempts and completions in a single season. He also led all Southern Conference quarterbacks in TD passes.



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Darragh broke a single game record with 51 passes as he led a frantic fourth quarter rally against Virginia Tech on November 12. The comeback fell just short as the Indians lost 20-18. Trailing 20-3 entering the fourth quarter “W&M, led by tireless Dan Darragh and a pair of pressure-packed receivers, scored twice in an exciting last period while 13,000 Cary Field patrons roared to the end.”<sup>ii</sup> Darragh fired 10-yard and one-yard TD’s to Ned Carr as well as a two-point conversion in the fourth quarter. He completed 20 of the 51 passes for 239 yards, but a late interception killed their final rally.

In the best game of his career at William and Mary, Darragh threw four touchdown passes and scored on a 3-yard run to account for all the Indians’ scoring in the team’s 34-14 win over Villanova on October 9. He threw 10 and 22-yard TD’s to Carr and 9 and 13 yards to Chuck Albertson. He was named the Southern Conference back of the week.

Darragh had another four-touchdown passing game in the Indians’ season-ending 35-19 win over Richmond, ensuring their back-to-back winning records. He also had his best rushing game with 77 yards on 10 carries, earning him his second Southern Conference back of the week award of the season. With the win the Indians tied East Carolina for the Southern Conference Championship. Darragh finished second in the league in total offense and second in passing. Dan was named second team All-Conference.

Darragh led William and Mary to their third consecutive winning season in 1967, finishing with a second consecutive 5-4-1 record. Head coach Levy began the season with Madden as the starting quarterback wanting to emphasize the running game. However, the team started with a 1-3 record and Madden was injured in the first series in their fifth game against VMI. Darragh came off the bench, sparking the Indians to a 33-28 victory. He ran for two touchdowns and passed for another while completing 11 of 20 passes for 195 yards and running for an additional 28 yards in the victory. He was named Southern Conference offensive player of the week for his gutty performance.

Darragh was named the starter the following week and led the Indians to consecutive victories over Ohio U., 25-22, Navy, 27-16, and The Citadel, 24-0 and a 16-16 tie with Southern Conference Champion West Virginia. In the tie with the Mountaineers, Darragh had moved the team to the West Virginia 25-yard line in the closing seconds setting up a game-winning field goal attempt. However, the kick was missed, and the Indians settled for the tie.

Dan sparked the surprising victory over Navy, their first win over the Midshipman in 25 years. He completed 13 of 25 passes for 173 yards and two touchdowns while also running for 41 yards and another score in the 27-16 victory. He was named Southern



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Conference offensive player of the week for the second time in his senior season and for the fifth time in his career.

William and Mary finished the season on a down note, losing to Richmond 16-7. Darragh finished his season completing 84 of 180 passes for 1119 yards and 8 TD's. He led the team in scoring with six touchdowns for 36 points and he was second in the Southern Conference in passing yards per attempt at 6.2.

Dan repeated as second team All-Southern Conference for the third year in a row and was voted to the Associated Press's Virginia All-Big Five team as the first team quarterback. Darragh was also voted by his teammates as the most outstanding person on the football squad. His fraternity brothers had a couple nicknames for Dan: "Dapper Dan" and "The Deacon."

Darragh finished his career with the Indians sporting an overall 16-12-2 record during his tenure. It was the best three-year record for William and Mary since 1947-49 and the first time they had three consecutive winning seasons since that time. When he graduated in the spring of 1968 with a degree in chemistry, he held virtually every school passing record.

Head coach Levy left William and Mary the following season after a 3-7 mark and began his professional football coaching career as a kicking coach for the Philadelphia Eagles in 1969. He left the Eagles in 1970 and joined George Allen with the Rams, becoming the first special teams coach in NFL history and would finish his Hall of Fame coaching career leading the Buffalo Bills to four straight Super Bowls in the early 1990's.

Darragh said about playing for Levy several years later, "He was a very intense guy, very kind of intellectual, almost aloof. He was very dedicated to what he was doing. He didn't have the greatest rapport with his players. He kept his distance."<sup>iii</sup> He went on to say, "When I met him again in Buffalo it was like meeting a different guy. He was much more outgoing. He was delightful."<sup>iv</sup>

The Bills drafted Darragh in the 13<sup>th</sup> round with the 336<sup>th</sup> overall selection in the 1968 NFL Draft on January 31. In addition to Levy, several other former Bills players and coaches have connections to William and Mary including, kicker Steve Christie, running back Al Crow, safety Mark Kelso, head coaches Buster Ramsey, and Harvey Johnson and offensive coordinator Dan Henning.

While Darragh was preparing for his professional football career in the spring of 1968, some of his classmates were fighting a war in Vietnam and the Tet Offensive was



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creating havoc for U.S. soldiers while turning America against the war. Darragh signed his Bills contract on June 6, 1968 and his dream of professional football was coming true. He joined a Bills team with two very successful veteran quarterbacks, Jack Kemp and Tom Flores, that positioned him well to learn from in his rookie season. However, that changed quickly as both Kemp and Flores were injured during the preseason. The Bills were desperate and even traded for former Florida quarterback Kay Stephenson.

Darragh made his professional preseason debut playing the third quarter in the Bills' 13-9 win over the Detroit Lions on August 5. He completed one of five passes for four yards and led the Bills to a field goal in his one quarter of play. Rookie running back Gary McDermott snared his first completion.

In the Bills' second preseason game, a 28-28 tie with the Miami Dolphins, Darragh threw his first pro touchdown pass, a 24-yard beauty to rookie Ben Gregory. However, he also threw three interceptions. Darragh played the second half against the Cincinnati Bengals on August 17 and led the Bills on an 83-yard drive that he finished with a one-yard run for the only touchdown in the Bills' 10-6 victory.

Darragh was named the Bills' starting quarterback on August 28, after Kemp was sidelined with a season-ending knee injury. Dan played the final preseason game against the Cleveland Browns as the starter. He acquitted himself well with the young team despite the Bills' 22-12 loss. He completed 15 of 33 passes for 196 yards and scrambled three times for 11 yards. Darragh solidified his spot as the opening day starter with his performance. "He did a fine job, he has a strong arm and wonderful poise,"<sup>v</sup> head coach Joe Collier said.

As a 13<sup>th</sup> round draft choice, Darragh may be the lowest drafted quarterback to ever start the opening game of his rookie season. He was behind center when the Bills opened their season against the Boston Patriots on September 8. Darragh led an all-rookie backfield including fullback Ben Gregory and halfback Max Anderson as well as a rookie wide receiver in Haven Moses. In their first regular season pro football game, Darragh was only able to lead the club to one touchdown, an impressive 77-yard drive on the first series of the game. The drive concluded with tight end Paul Costa running an end around for a four-yard TD. The offense struggled after that auspicious start. Dan finished the game completing 13 of 25 passes for 150 yards with two interceptions and he took four sacks.

The Bills were completely buried in week 2 against the defending AFL champion Oakland Raiders, losing 48-6. Darragh completed only 4 of 20 passes for 48 yards, but he did throw his first regular season professional touchdown pass, a 7-yarder to Bob



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Cappadona in the third quarter. Head coach Joe Collier was fired at the conclusion of the game and was replaced by Harvey Johnson.

Johnson's first game as head coach had similar results. Although the Bills were in the game into the fourth quarter, they lost to the Bengals 34-23. Darragh completed 14 of 33 passes for 152 yards with one interception.

The following week the Bills pulled off one of the biggest upsets in team history with a stunning 37-35 victory over the New York Jets. Darragh completed 8 of 18 passes for 79 yards with one interception, but it was the defense that led the Bills to victory. They intercepted five Joe Namath passes returning three for touchdowns. The highlight of the day for Dan was sneaking the football with 18 seconds left to run out the clock and secure his first victory as a starting quarterback in the AFL.

The Bills returned to their losing ways on October 5 as the Kansas City Chiefs defeated them 18-7. Darragh threw a 5-yard TD pass to fellow rookie Haven Moses while compiling 136 yards passing in the loss. Darragh with both ankles injured and his throwing arm sore, was replaced as the starting quarterback by Tom Flores the following week versus Miami. However, Flores with his own set of injuries did not last and was replaced by Kay Stephenson. He was ineffective and with the Bills trailing 14-6, the injured Darragh made a valiant entrance into the game. In the final two minutes he directed the Bills on an 80-yard drive in 12 plays capping it off with a 3-yard touchdown pass to Gary McDermott cutting the Dolphins lead to 14-12. The Bills were successful on the two-point conversion on a halfback option pass from Ed Rutkowski to McDermott to secure a 14-14 tie.

Darragh was back under center the following week at Fenway Park in Boston. Dan, still fighting off an arm injury, fired four interceptions in the Bills' 23-6 loss to the Patriots. A combination of Darragh's injuries, limiting his capabilities, and his ineffectiveness, put him on the bench. Johnson inserted Stephenson as the starting quarterback and he stayed under center for the Bills next three games, all losses. In his third start Stephenson broke his collarbone and was lost for the season. Darragh replaced him following the injury and played poorly as the Bills lost 21-17. He sat in the corner of the Bills locker room after the game with tears running down his face. "I was miserable. I was undoubtedly the worst football player anywhere out there today. Go away, leave me alone. I am rotten."<sup>vi</sup>

Dan tried to give it a go the following week against the San Diego Chargers. He played the first half, but he bruised his ribs to go along with his already sore arm and injured ankles, and sat out the second half. It was his last start of the season. Rutkowski started the final four games of the season, all losses. Darragh did make an appearance in the final game of the season, throwing 14 passes completing 6 for 48 yards with two interceptions.



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The Bills season mercifully ended with a 1-12-1 record. Considering Darragh was thrown into the starting position because of injuries and dealing with his own injuries he acquitted himself reasonably well with such a young team and his future looked bright. He played in 11 games with seven starts while completing 92 of 215 passes for 917 with three touchdowns and 14 interceptions. Darragh was the starting quarterback in the Bills upset win over the Jets and he led the comeback in the tie with Miami, the only two bright spots in an otherwise dreadful season.

Between the 1968 and 1969 seasons, Darragh kept himself busy. He married the former Ruth Randall, who was a stewardess on one of the Bills chartered flights in 1968. He worked at Aetna Life Insurance Co.

“He showed remarkable poise and grasp of play-calling. A series of injuries hurt his effectiveness from mid-season on. Has fine size and throwing ability. Mobility is adequate. Should have bright pro future,”<sup>vii</sup> is how the Bills 1969 media guide assessed Darragh in preparation for the upcoming season.

The Bills had a healthy but aging Kemp returning, drafted Grambling quarterback James Harris, and had holdovers Kay Stephenson and Benny Russell all battling for QB spots on the roster. Darragh missed training camp and part of the regular season as he completed his commitment to the Army Reserves. He was finally activated on October 24 after Harris had a season-ending injury.

In the first game he was activated to play, Darragh replaced an ineffective Kemp in the second half of the Bills game in Miami on October 26. Darragh’s rust showed as he completed only 6 of 17 passes for 81 yards and had two passes intercepted in the Bills 24-6 loss. The Bills running game was so ineffective that Darragh actually outgained O.J. Simpson, rushing for 16 yards while O.J. only mustered 12.

Darragh started the next two games for the Bills at quarterback, losing 29-7 to Kansas City and 16-6 to the Jets. In the Chiefs game Darragh had four interceptions to go with one touchdown pass, a 14 yarder to Marlin Briscoe and was sacked nine times. He was playing very well against the Jets, completing 8 of 10 passes for 152 yards until he was sacked by Verlon Biggs and Gerry Philbin dislocating his right shoulder. The injury ended his season and would have a long-term impact. He finished his sophomore season playing in only three games while completing 24 of 52 passes for 365 yards with 1 TD and 6 interceptions.

Dan was back for his third year with Buffalo in 1970. Kemp retired after the 1969 season and the Bills drafted Dennis Shaw from San Diego State to go along with returnees Harris and Darragh. The Bills also added free agent Virgil Carter to the competition.



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Darragh faced a dilemma at the start of training camp. The NFL players decided to strike over pension benefits; should he join the boycott or not? He decided to cross the picket line and participate at the start of training camp. NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle stepped in and worked with the players union to end the strike quickly. The players were only out of camp for a few days.

Darragh battled Harris throughout training camp for the starting position. Shaw was late to training camp holding out while finalizing his contract. Carter competed as well, and once Shaw got to camp, he was busy learning the complex playbook. Rauch cut Harris and Carter near the end of camp and went with Darragh and Shaw to start the season.

Darragh started the first two games while Shaw was still learning the intricate offense. The Bills lost to the Broncos in the opener 25-10 with Darragh playing most of the game but was relieved by Shaw in the fourth quarter. The following week the Bills were shutout by the Los Angeles Rams 19-0. With Buffalo trailing 16-0 at the half and Darragh a dismal 4 of 13 passing, Rauch inserted Shaw and the starting job was his for the rest of the season. Darragh was relegated to the bench and saw very little playing time from that point forward. Harris was re-signed and activated in early October. At that point, Darragh became the third-string quarterback. He threw one pass the remainder of the season, a 2-yard completion to Wayne Patrick in the Bills' 23-10 loss to Pittsburgh on October 11.

Darragh fought through injuries every year of his professional career. Following the 1970 season, Darragh decided to call it quits. "It was my decision to retire. I didn't get cut. I just decided that with the shoulder injury and the problems I was having with my elbow, I should think about moving on with my life. I had taken the LSATS and done well on them. I was admitted to UB law school in 1970."<sup>viii</sup>

"In October 1971 I got a call from the Denver Broncos asking me 'If Lou Saban called you up and offered you a quarterback position out in Denver, would you consider going out there?' I said, 'Have him call me.' Saban called the next day and said 'We need somebody. Come out and we'll discuss the money.' But by that point, I was working as a clerk in a law firm and I thought about it real hard. Once that happened and I made that decision, I closed the door on my pro football life."<sup>ix</sup>

Darragh went to law school and completed his law degree at Duquesne University in 1975. He worked for two years at Eastern Associated Coal Corp., defending cases of violations of the 1969 Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. He did as much as he could do there and decided to return to Buffalo to work for one of the larger law firms in the city. He spent 16 years practicing law in Western New York while raising three daughters, Colleen, Kate, and Heather, with his wife Ruth in the Queen City. Dan and



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Ruth moved back to Pittsburgh in 1991 when he “became a partner in the law firm of Eckert, Seamans, Cherin & Mellott.”<sup>x</sup>

Darragh practiced law in Pittsburgh for many years, most recently with Cohen and Grigsby, P.C. with specialties in Intellectual Property Litigation, Environmental Litigation and Commercial Litigation. Dan also was very active in Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh, serving as its Board President for a time.

He and Ruth still reside in the Pittsburgh area.

#### End Notes:

<sup>i</sup> UPI, “Davidson Takes First Loss, 41-7,” *The Tyler Courier-Times*, October 17, 1965, p25

<sup>ii</sup> Moskowitz, Bob, “Late TD’s Fail to Halt Gobler-Led Stafford,” *Daily Press* (Newport News, Virginia, November 13, 1966, p31

<sup>iii</sup> Smizik, Bob, “Darragh Still has a Case for the Bills,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, January 27, 1992, p26

<sup>iv</sup> Smizik, Bob, “Darragh Still has a Case for the Bills,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, January 27, 1992, p26

<sup>v</sup> AP, “Darragh, Anderson Star in Loss,” *The Piqua Daily Call* (Piqua, Ohio), August 31, 1968, p6

<sup>vi</sup> Huber, Jim, “No Tears from Stephenson ‘I’ll Give 1968 up for Lent,’” *The Miami News*, November 11, 1968, p28

<sup>vii</sup> *Buffalo Bills 1969 Media Guide*, Buffalo Bills Inc. , c 1969

<sup>viii</sup> Miller, Jeffrey, *Rockin the Rockpile*, ECW Press, c 2007, p480

<sup>ix</sup> Miller, Jeffrey, *Rockin the Rockpile*, ECW Press, c 2007, p480

<sup>x</sup> Smizik, Bob, “Darragh Still has a Case for the Bills,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, January 27, 1992, p26