

CALIFORNIA TODAY

Former Basketball Player Finds His Niche in Hollywood

Dane DiLiegro found his theatrical calling playing monsters onscreen and dreams of more in Los Angeles.



By Shawn Hubler

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Dane DiLiegro as the Predator in "Prey." Photo by David Bukach

Los Angeles, like its signature art form, is constantly evolving, but some L.A. stories don't change.

Three years ago, Dane DiLiegro came to Hollywood, having spent most of his life as an athlete. He had played basketball, first at his Massachusetts high school, then at the University of New Hampshire, and then, for eight adventure-filled years, professionally in Europe.

He had other dreams and skills, too, but at 31, he was struggling to deploy them. He dreamed, for example, of being the next Anthony Bourdain, hosting a show on culinary travel. At one point, between seasons, he apprenticed in Italy with the famed Tuscan butcher Dario Cecchini. He even worked up a YouTube show to pitch to producers, telling the camera that it would be "kind of like life — life, you don't really live for a direction, you live for the adventure, you live in the moment."

Also, as he told me earlier this year, when I met him, "no matter how good you are, the career of a professional athlete is finite." But at 6 feet 8½ inches tall, he was somewhat typecast, job-wise. He doubted his stay would be long in Los Angeles.

But typecasting in Los Angeles is in the eye of the beholder. A few years prior, a film company had come to Boston and was looking for actors. On the advice of an admirer — OK, his mom — DiLiegro, home for a visit, had answered the ad. He didn't get a role, but a year or two later, while he was visiting his parents again, the company called back, looking for a muscular stand-in.

"I ended up just standing around the set all day, talking to the stunt coordinator," he remembered. But the stunt coordinator had a suggestion — what *he* would do, were he not a stunt coordinator but an affable, hardworking, 6 foot 8½ inch basketball player looking to make a career change.

"Dude, you need to be in monster movies," he said.



Dane DiLiegro, center, as the Muscle Monster in the 2020 television series "Sweet Home."
Dane DiLiegro



That is how DiLiegro landed in a Los Angeles subculture as time-honored as Conan the Barbarian and the former athlete who played him. Armed with a couple of names and his YouTube travel series, DiLiegro came west.

There were no takers for the travel show, but one producer was shooting in Korea for Netflix and needed someone to play “a mutated human the size of a door who would smash through walls and chase people and crush them.” Was DiLiegro interested?

He was.

“I had to wear this foam latex suit that weighed 80 pounds,” he recalled. “My feet were four inches off the floor and my toes stuck out four inches. I weighed 320 pounds with that suit, and foam latex is a sponge, so the weight would increase as the day went by. I had never acted before. OK, in summer camp I think I did drama but it was, like, an elective.”

Never mind. He had caught the bug. Plus, now he was stuck in Los Angeles: The pandemic hit by the time the Korean shoot wrapped, leaving him and millions of others with little to do but stay home and watch Netflix.

So he learned how to mime. He studied acting. He stuck with it, even during the dry spells and disappointments. Soon — like zombies, but in a good way — offers began to beget offers.

There was a small part in “Monsters of California,” a movie directed by the former lead singer of Blink-182, Tom DeLonge, “where kids go looking for monsters and find them,” he said. There was a larger part in a Disney+ series called “The Quest.” (“I played the Dragior, this forest god — kids are trying to get a power gem from me and have to complete tasks to essentially defeat me.”)



Dane DiLiegro



Dane DiLiegro takes a selfie as Ba'al, a fertility demon, on "American Horror Stories."

Dane DiLiegro

He played Ba'al, a fertility demon, in "American Horror Stories." Since Friday, he's been streaming on Hulu as the Predator in "Prey," the franchise's new prequel. ("I was told to bring a balletic svelte-ness to this creature," he said. "The No. 1 word the director used was 'feral.'")

Now he lives in West Hollywood when he's not on location, and spends his spare time studying masters such as Doug Jones, who starred in "Pan's Labyrinth" and "Hellboy."

"People don't realize," he said. "There's a lot of nuance that goes into playing a monster. With each movement, your body is telling a story."

And because his is an L.A. story, DiLiegro hasn't stopped dreaming.

"Someday, I hope to play a human, too," he said.

For more:

- What to watch this summer.
- Judging by social media feeds, "Prey," which became available on Friday, was last weekend's most popular movie, Scott Mendelson at Forbes writes, though it might not have been a box office hit had it been in theaters.