

Liliane Tannoury

Giving football a fresh new look

She has been working in the world of sports broadcast for over a decade and is currently a sports producer and presenter for Al Arabiya news channel. Liliane Tannoury is one of very few Arab women who are thriving in sports journalism and the Lebanese Dubai resident has interviewed some of football's top stars, including Cristiano Ronaldo and Andres Iniesta.

Sport360 caught up with Tannoury to know more about what she's been doing to prove that football journalism is not just a man's game.

Interview by Reem Abulleil

How did you get into sports broadcasting?

My whole family is athletic and we all played different sports. You can say that it's in our blood. I started off playing volleyball as a hobby but then I took it more seriously and played professionally and became the captain of my team. I realised how much I loved sport and I chose to make a career out of it, specialise in it. I wanted to work in my passion. I started in a very small local channel in Lebanon then I went to Brazil and stayed there for two years.

I specialised in beach volleyball, and volleyball training and at the same time I was working for a local Brazilian station in Sao Paolo, where I was living. I came back from Brazil in 2001, stayed in Lebanon a bit then I joined Al Arabiya as they were launching their sports department. I've been with them since 2003.

You started in volleyball, how did you get to know so much about football?

When you like sport, you pretty much follow all sport, especially football. I always used to follow football since I was living in Lebanon.

Obviously living in Brazil, the home of football, also helped a lot and when I got back and started working in this field, I got to know a lot more about Arab football, Gulf football, and international football. When you like something, you work hard to master it, which is what I believe or I hope I've managed to do.

It's such a male-dominant field, what's it like for you being one of the very few Arab women working in sports broadcast?

I fell in love with the sport and I grew up in a family that loves it as well.

When I started here in the Gulf, everyone I met would ask me, "why are you working in sport?" They were surprised. The two guys who I work with on my team, when I joined, they were like "who is this girl they are making us work with, what does she know about football?"

But that just created a more interesting challenge for me. To show everyone that this is not a field that is strictly for men.



Who says that only men can work in sport or football? It's like they took up the field and monopolised it. But that's not really the case. I wanted to prove that there's room for women in this domain. Even in Europe, when I go there to interview players, they always have this preconception that I wouldn't know what I'm talking about. They also don't assume we're professionals just because we're women. So I'm constantly making extra effort to prove that I am just as professional as any man in the field, or even more professional.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced?

In Europe the players are bound by their sponsors, clubs, agents and managers and it's very challenging to get interviews without paying. I did 10 interviews in Spain this year in a nine-day period. The biggest players in Spain. I did it after finally finding a way around the whole payment issue, I managed to get the interviews through personal contacts. But it's not easy.

Who would you consider your favourite interviewee?

I've done most of my interviews in Spain and the most person I enjoyed interviewing was Gerard Pique (left) because you really feel he is very intellectual and cultured. He is the only player who showed up on time, which shows how much respect he has for others. He was in the room before I even got there and I told him that this is quite rare so he told me, "I'm different than the others, don't compare me to anyone else." The way he talks, you can tell he's different. He has his own business even though he



doesn't need to do that but he has a forward plan which is very good.

Of all the events you've attended, which did you enjoy covering the most?

I'd have to say the World Cup. I went to South Africa in 2010 and I was in Brazil for this year's World Cup. Brazil is different. It's the home of football. It has a football atmosphere like nowhere in the world.

I was at the Copacabana and there was a protest against the World Cup, and right behind them there were two guys dancing and performing, celebrating the World Cup. They have this ability to combine music and football in an incredible way.

Since you've lived in Brazil, I take it you speak Portuguese?

Yes I speak English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and I'm starting slowly to learn some Spanish.

What are your future hopes and goals?

It's a big question. The channel I work for, we don't own the rights for actual events so I can't really have my own programme. But what I enjoy and what I want to do is help

introduce the players to the world. Show the fans what those players are really like.

Do you enjoy covering other sports?

I enjoy tennis and football. I sometimes go to the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships, I've done the horse racing, the Formula One in Abu Dhabi. It depends on what events would interest our viewers.

What was it like interviewing Cristiano Ronaldo?

That's a long story. I got the approval from his agent. His club (Real Madrid) was against the interview because they wanted money, because they own his media rights. But I managed to reach his agent and we confirmed an interview. I was in Lebanon for New Year's and the agent told me I have to do the interview the following day in Dubai.

I'm on my holiday in Beirut and I had to be at Ronaldo's hotel in Dubai within 24 hours. So I flew over, booked cameras and lights and everything I needed and I went to the hotel and set up. I waited for a long time, it's normal to wait for like three or four hours for any players, I'm used to it. Ronaldo had been busy all day and when he got to his villa in the hotel he was tired and his agent told me he didn't want to do the interview anymore.

After flying and getting the equipment and everything... so I told him that's not going to work. We already had an agreement and my company already spent a lot of money to make this interview happen. So he said fine and I eventually got the interview but the entire time, I'm asking him questions and Cristiano is looking to his agent like he's complaining to him that he's tired. It was interesting but we ended up with some decent footage.

