



Cassie Oursler (31) has grown into her role at Buffalo. (Mark Wallheiser/University at Buffalo)

## Oursler confidently grew into her role with UB basketball

By [Amy Moritz](#) | Published March 18, 2018 | Updated March 19, 2018

TALLAHASSEE – She was always the tall girl. And for the most part, that was just fine with Cassie Oursler. She was the tall girl all through her playing days at Grand Island including being named the Western New York Player of the Year in 2013.

She was the tall girl when she went to Pittsburgh to play for Robert Morris in the Northeast Conference and the tall girl, again, when she transferred back home to the University at Buffalo. But in all honesty, it wasn't until this season, her senior year for the Bulls and at age 23, when Oursler completely embraced all that being the tall girl can bring her. She noticed it this season, when talking with her friend and mentor Kristin Williams, the senior women's administrator for the Mid-American Conference.

"Kristin was like, 'You just realized you're tall this year. You just figured out how to work with your body.' I'm like that's so true," said the 6-foot-3 Oursler. Perhaps it's an outgrowth of the encouragement she received from Buffalo head coach Felisha Legette-Jack. "Coach is always like, 'Wear heels, flaunt your height,'" Oursler said. "I've always been very confident about my height because growing up, I was always the tallest no matter what. So my family was always like 'be confident, be confident,' which I was." But there's a little more swagger in her confidence these days.

"I do wear heels now and I love to wear heels," Oursler said. "Can't walk too well in them yet. I'm just a year deep into this. But I really do love my height. I get a lot of attention when I go out. People will say, 'Oh do you play basketball?' I'll joke around and say, 'No I play mini-golf.' Just random stuff. I do love it. Over the last 23 years I have grown into this tall woman that I love to be."

She has grown into a versatile post-player, one who can play the traditional back-to-the-basket role and one who can step out and hit buckets with some range. And she's evolved into a centering presence on the court. While point guard Stephanie Reid efficiently runs the show and Cierra Dillard provides stylish offense, Oursler provides the perspective. She's a calming force on the floor, able to change her focus depending on what the game brings her on a given day.

Score points? Oursler can do that. She's averaging a career-best 13.1 points this season and has hit the 20-point mark four different times. But sometimes those shots aren't falling. And that's where Oursler has taken a giant step forward this season. She has developed a fluid mentality, one that allows her to see where she can be most effective.

Take Saturday's NCAA Tournament game against South Florida, for example. Oursler was rushing and missing shots, including blowing uncontested layups. But Oursler wasn't easily rattled. After some positive self-talk, she got to work on defense and drew a charge early in the second quarter that helped change the momentum of the game.

"I did a lot of mental talk, honestly," Oursler said. "I just had to talk myself through my shots and layups. I really focused on defense. I knew our defense was going to be what won us the game so I just made sure I was giving everything on D and helping out. Taking that charge was pretty cool and got everyone hyped." That defensive stance seemed to put the Bulls at ease. Oursler may have missed some easy shots, but she was in the game. Her teammates could relax and draw confidence from her. And away they went, earning the 102-79 upset over South Florida and advancing to Monday's second-round matchup with Florida State in the NCAA Tournament.

"The thing is about Cassie is, even when it's not going well for her, she is never going to give up," Reid said. "(Saturday) I think she did a great job. The first half she didn't play her best basketball, and she knew that. In the second half, she ran the floor and got an easy transition layup because she doesn't give up and she is relentless. We love her. She is a positive teammate that you want to have on the court with you." She's a positive influence that everyone wants to be around. Including little kids.

Before Reid answered a question about Oursler at Sunday afternoon's NCAA press conference, Legette-Jack leaned over and made a joke about Oursler's day care center. Seems that even at 6-foot-3, Oursler is a natural draw for children. "We joke about her being a day care service," Legette-Jack said. "Every single kid loves her; it is scary. You see a little 5-year-old, who runs away from strangers, run up to her and run towards her. She has that personality that says, 'You're welcome. Come towards me. I might be 6-3, but I receive you.' She makes everybody on the floor feel that way. When she's on the court, you almost have calmness about yourself because when she is out there, something is going to happen."

Oh, and that line about the day care service? It's more than just a joke. Oursler has aspirations to play professionally after this season and she will certainly have her choice of opportunities to play overseas. But when that is all said and done, she sees herself back in Western New York, running her own day care center.

"I love working with kids," Oursler said. "I love the developing mind and seeing kids grow and flourish. I've always loved it. I think having my little sister born was I was 15, that really is what made me so passionate about early childhood education. Watching my little sister grow up, she's 8 now, it's awesome. I love that. And I really do want to open a day care and run my own. That's my goal after I play more years of basketball first. My plan down the road is to have five kids. We'll see if I can find somebody crazy enough to do it with me."