

Neutz, Oliver are driving forces on UB's offense

Wideout, running back, both fifth-year seniors, imprinting their names in Bulls' record books



Alex Neutz, left, and Branden Oliver are two of the most prolific producers in UB history. James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

By Bob DiCesare | News Sports Reporter | [@tbndicesare](#)

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When Alex Neutz first joined up with UB football it felt like the 20-minute commute from Grand Island placed him in another world. His teammates had broader shoulders. Faster legs. More complete skill sets. For the first time since his stellar high school career, uncertainty entered the equation as Neutz reflected on his own abilities.

"I think it was more, 'Can I play here?', more of a question," he said. "It was overwhelming my first camp. It's a different ball game. You come from high school where you just know you're going to score touchdowns, you just know your team's going to win that game. You come in here and it's, 'Wow, these are

some talented players.' You're nervous at first. You're so close to home and it's like, 'I can't disappoint my hometown people.' I think that motivated me to work even harder."

An unwavering dedication to improvement is one of the common threads connecting Neutz and Branden "Bo" Oliver, two of the most prolific offensive producers in the history of UB football. The two fifth-year seniors, remnants of Turner Gill's final recruiting class, already have secured significant spots among the school's career leaders and will continue to climb ladders throughout their final season.

Oliver, a workhorse running back with rippling muscles, needs 627 yards to eclipse James Starks' record of 3,140. That appears a given since Oliver amassed a team-high 812 yards last year while missing five full games because of injury. He's also two 100-yard days away from overtaking Anthony Swan's mark of 13 and 257 carries away from Swan's standard of 812 career attempts. Oliver ran 306 times while rushing for UB's single-season record of 1,395 yards as a sophomore.

Does the numbers' chase motivate him?

"When I was younger it did," said Oliver, who two years ago declared his desire to become the top single-season rusher. "When I was younger it really meant something but right now I just want something to happen overall as a team and that's winning a MAC championship. We got to take it one day at a time for that."

Neutz, a sure-handed wideout and the Bulls' offensive MVP last season, probably won't top the charts with any of his final career numbers. Instead, he'll likely keep company with two of UB's other outstanding receivers, Naaman Roosevelt and Drew Haddad.

With 134 career catches, Neutz is 51 receptions from ranking third behind Roosevelt (268) and Haddad (240). With 2,070 career yards, he needs just 262 to vault from seventh to third behind Roosevelt (3,551) and Haddad (3,409). Neutz needs 10 TD receptions to break Roosevelt's record of 28. He's already second all-time in the category.

As he continues the climb, Neutz takes his place in an exclusive grouping comprising two players with NFL time.

"That would be cool," Neutz said. "It's like leaving a legacy, leaving 1-2-3 in yards, catches and touchdowns just would show me that I really left a mark on this program coming from Western New York and I was able to go out and really just leave a name for myself."

There are trademarks to the play of both players. For Neutz, it's his ability to outmaneuver defenders and make a catch in jammed traffic. For Oliver, it's the sheer power and determined approach he brings to the field, whether carrying the ball or blocking a defender.

"Branden Oliver is one of my favorite players, and I've told it to him, I've told it to the team," Bulls coach Jeff Quinn said. "Why? Because he plays with a tremendous, relentless effort. His first play and his last play, you can't tell. ... He's been a tremendous inspirational leader to our football team."

As for Neutz, Quinn said, "He catches everything. It's amazing how his hand-and-eye coordination is. Timing. His spatial awareness. Being able to do the things that very few players are capable of doing. Fearless. He is a tremendous player because he concentrates. He's locked in the moment every single second out there. So he catches everything he should and the ones that most can't."

The two could go in the NFL Draft in April. At the very least they figure to get their shot as undrafted free agents.

"They're both on watch lists and that tells you something," Quinn said.

Oliver is recognized on the watch lists for the Maxwell Award (best player) and Doak Walker Award (best running back), Neutz made the list for the Biletnikoff Award (top receiver). The days of self-doubt are long gone.

"We came in with a huge class and we're only leaving with about half that class," Neutz said. "But the guys who stayed behind I think really left a mark on this program."

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