

American Football, *Italian Style*

The making of an overachiever: Brock Olivo

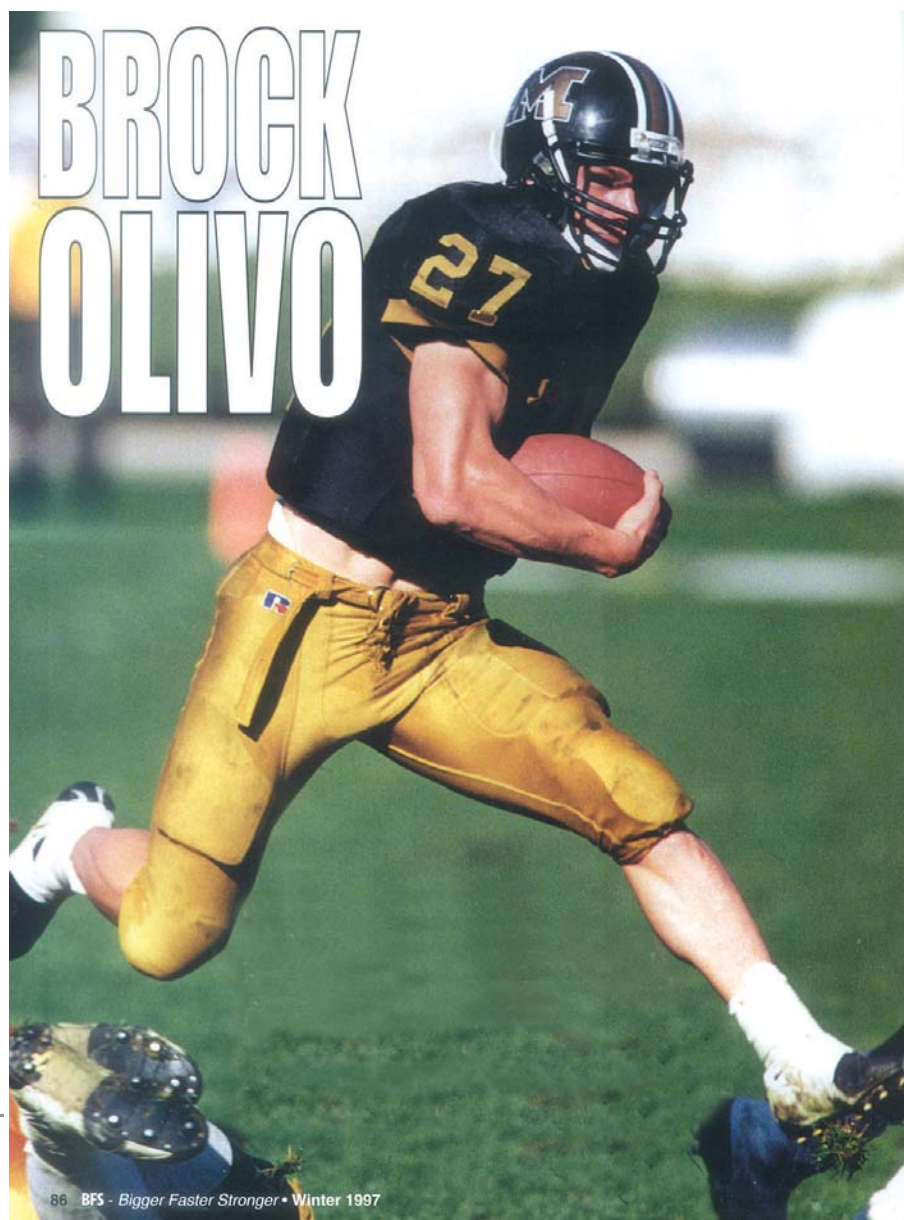
BY JEFF SCURRAN, BFS CLINICIAN

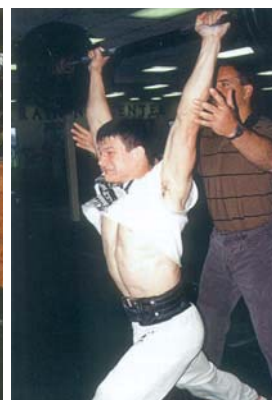
Brock Olivo has always been an overachiever.

Olivo attended St. Francis Borgia Regional High School in Washington, Missouri. From the first time he stepped onto a high school football field, Olivo realized he had neither the size nor the talent to compete with the naturally gifted athletes. However, Olivo's high school had adopted the BFS Program, and with that advantage, along with his own great work ethic and focus, Olivo rushed for 5,030 yards and 70 touchdowns. In 1993 his team won the Missouri Class 3A State Championship with a 14-0 record.

During college recruiting, coach Larry Smith of the University of Missouri took a chance on this undersized running back and took Olivo under his wing. With the tutoring of an experienced football mentor, Olivo's work ethic and attitude enabled him to break the school's career rushing and touchdown records. After Olivo's senior year the university retired his

A BFS-trained athlete, Brock Olivo played for the University of Missouri and went on to play in the NFL.





Olivo was a physical phenomenon. In college Olivo bench pressed 420, power cleaned 385, jerked 400, and had five percent body-fat at a body-weight of 214 pounds.

jersey. Although undrafted, he made the roster in 1998 for the Detroit Lions, where he played fullback and played on special teams for five seasons.

Today, Olivo is retired from the NFL and is now the head coach for the Italian American Football National Team; he lives full-time in Italy with his wife, Samuela, and daughter, Sofia, who was born this year. His famous work ethic is still his calling card, and he's trying to instill these positive values in the players he personally recruits from all over Italy.

I caught up with Olivo in Florence, Italy, this past June. We were both speaking at the Italian American Football Coaches Association Clinic. With Olivo's athletic accomplishments and exceptional success in the BFS system, we hit it off right away, and he agreed to be interviewed for *BFS*.

SCURRAN: *How did you end up coaching in Europe?*

OLIVO: After I retired from the NFL, I took off for Italy to discover where my great-grandfather had come from. While I was in Italy, a friend of mine told me there were some American football teams around and that I should contact them to see if they needed some help coaching. I contacted the team in Rome, and they

hired me that day. That was 2003. I subsequently returned to the States for some years before eventually returning to Italy this year. I am currently the head coach of the Italian National Football Team, which will play for the European Cup in August in Wolfsberg, Austria.

SCURRAN: *How is your team doing, and what does the future look like for them?*

OLIVO: At this point, my team is in the middle of training camp in preparation for the European Cup that is coming up in August. We have yet to play a game, but we are making progress in practices, and so I can only say that I am anxious to see how we perform.

SCURRAN: *What is the difference between football in the US and in Europe?*

OLIVO: The biggest difference is the speed of the game. Our American football players are trained much more thoroughly than the European players. The American football culture has arrived in Europe, but some of the most important principles that separate the good from the great, such as off-season conditioning, diet and theory, haven't quite made it here yet. Italian football is still a "club" sport, and until

it becomes a serious endeavor, the level of play will remain a couple of steps behind the game that is played in the US.

SCURRAN: *The Junior (19 and under) World Bowl was held in Canton, Ohio, this summer. The US, with 45 Division 1 scholarshiped high school seniors and only two weeks of practice, embarrassed every team they faced. What will it take for the rest of the world to catch up – or is that impossible?*

OLIVO: I'm an eternal optimist, so I would say that nothing is impossible. However, it's like posing the question "The pizza was born and perfected in southern Italy; with the number of pizzerias sprouting up around the US, is it possible that the quality of pizza in America will surpass the quality of pizza in Italy?" Those who have traveled to Italy know the answer to that question.

SCURRAN: *How did BFS help you as a high school player? Was BFS a factor in your ability to become a highly rated college recruit?*

OLIVO: BFS provided the 1993 Missouri Class 3A State Champions with its winning formula in the off-season. That year we had a perfect 14-0 record and dominated everyone we played in both speed and strength.



Photo: Missouri Athletic Media Relations

Period. BFS helped me to establish my work ethic, and it gave me the confidence I needed in my training before I headed to the University of Missouri as a freshman in 1994.

SCURRAN: *What was your relationship to the late Larry Smith, your college coach? And why was it so special to you?*

OLIVO: I will never forget when Coach Smith and the late Curtis Jones came to my house to offer me a scholarship in the winter of 1994. Coach would always joke that I broke one his knuckles when I shook his hand because I was so fired up. There isn't enough time or space on this page to express how important Larry Smith was and always will be in my life. He took a chance on a skinny kid

from mid-Missouri and handed him the ball against the likes of Nebraska, Colorado, Texas and Oklahoma when nobody else would. When *Sports Illustrated* called Coach Smith "the coach you would most like your son to play for in college football," that was all I needed to hear to feel like

one of the most fortunate college football players of my time.

SCURRAN: *What moment stands out in your college career?*

OLIVO: The Missouri-Nebraska game from 1997. The Cornhuskers were ranked number one coming into our house. That season was the turnaround season at Missouri – the first winning season in 14 long years. We lost that game in the final seconds on one of the craziest plays in college football history – the famous "Flea-kicker." That game put Missouri football back on the map, with the help of Brent Musburger and ABC Sports. When people talk about the turnaround in Missouri football, they refer to Larry Smith and the '97 and '98 teams.



At left is BFS Founder/CEO Dr. Greg Shepard with the former Missouri Head Strength Coach Dave Toub and Olivio. At right is a current photo of Olivio with BFS Clinician Jeff Scurran.

SCURRAN: *And what moment stands out in the NFL?*

OLIVO: The moment that stands out was sealing a playoff berth by beating our division rival – the Tampa Bay Buccaneers – during my second season with the Detroit Lions. We were without Barry Sanders that season, and everyone wrote us off as a loser. We overcame great odds and had a winning season, thanks in large part to coach Chuck Priefer's special teams units.

SCURRAN: *How do you feel you matched up physically to your competition in the NFL? Did you continually strive to get stronger?*

OLIVO: I matched up physically with everyone I went up against. I prided myself on being one of the best-conditioned athletes on the field at all times.

SCURRAN: *What is the most important piece of advice you would give high school athletes who want to play in college and even the NFL?*

OLIVO: In the NFL it is a question of survival, almost in the literal sense of the word. The average NFL career is so short as a result of injuries. Therefore, it is imperative to train with that in mind. There is a fine line between improving and overtraining. Once I found that balance, I felt like a true professional and that I belonged in the NFL.

SCURRAN: *Why did you decide to go into coaching?*

OLIVO: I struggled for a long time to figure out what I wanted to do during "LAF" – life after football. I avoided the game for a long time, and then I realized that I had so much to offer in the way of teaching and forming young athletes. I want to give players the positive experience that I had

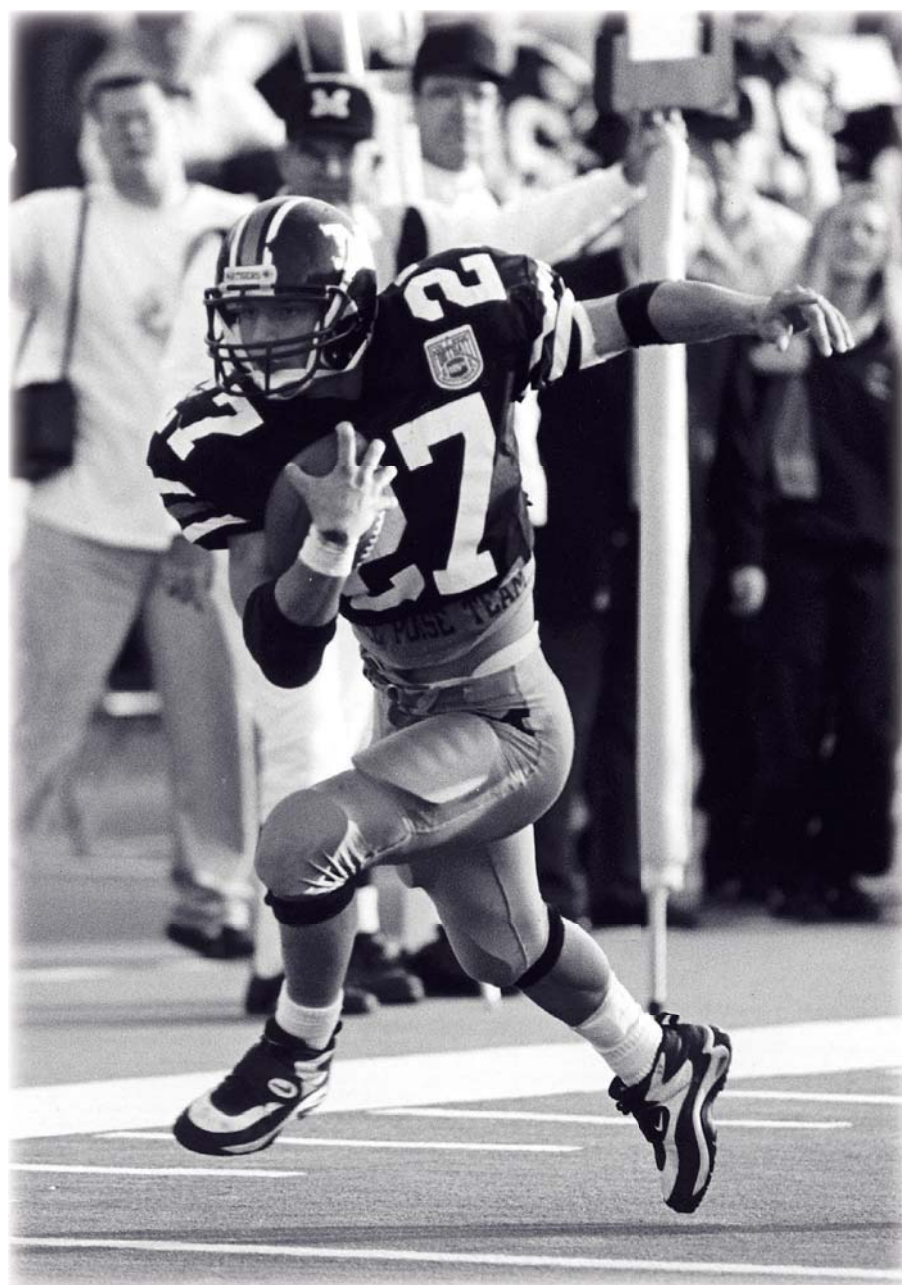


Photo: Mizzou Athletic Media Relations

during my career, and I am confident that I can do that both as a football coach and as a life coach. I believe it is important to remember how much of an influence a coach can be on athletes at every level even beyond the playing field.

SCURRAN: *What is the most difficult aspect of coaching and the most rewarding?*

OLIVO: The most difficult is organizing the daily routine – making

sure that everything runs smoothly. The most rewarding is seeing a young player develop into a man or a good player into a great player on your watch.

SCURRAN: *What are your future goals?*

OLIVO: My future goals are to be a GREAT father, a GREAT husband and to be successful as a coach at every level at which I am able to coach. **BFS**

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