

Over the mountain and to the field

LOGAN MURPHY

Division III recruiting, love of the game and a journey of 1,000 miles brought two Montana football players to Bethel University.

Growing up in the mountains of Montana, Lando Liudahl and David Aamot never imagined making the nearly 1,000 mile trek to play college football for Bethel University.

The boys met in seventh grade when they were on the same traveling basketball team, The Bozeman Bombers. They had two successful seasons and decided to attend Manhattan Christian School, a religious high school with fewer than 100 students in Churchill, a suburb of Bozeman.

The small farming town consisted of two churches, a car dealership, a bank and a farm equipment shop. It was a place where the main form of en-

tertainment on a Friday night was supporting the town's high school football team.

Lando played on the varsity football team through his sophomore year but dislocated his shoulder 17 times and endured three shoulder surgeries. Before his junior year, his doctor told him that he should never play football again. He didn't listen.

He came back stronger his junior year and started at both cornerback and wide receiver. It wasn't until his senior year that he started to run the football — the same thing he does for the Royals.

David didn't start playing football until his junior year of

high school, but as soon as he did, his skills were utilized at defensive end, outside linebacker, wide receiver or wherever else the coaches needed him.

Much like Lando, David also dealt with his share of injuries as he tore his meniscus twice, including once during his senior year that forced him to miss the first four games of the season.

The summer after their junior year, David and Lando boarded a plane to the Twin Cities. They attended the Concordia Combine at Concordia College in St. Paul with hopes of finding a team culture that mirrored what they had at their small

Christian high school.

The combine allows Division II and Division III colleges to evaluate players from all over the country. Due to NCAA rules, Division III schools aren't allowed to give out athletic scholarships, which makes it considerably harder to land top recruits.

"We would like to get the athletes here that are good enough to be scholarship athletes but turn those [scholarships] down," Bethel Athletic Director Bob Bjorkland said. "Because the opportunity to be at Bethel is so compelling, and we've had a number of those [students]."

After the camp, the boys



Lando Liudahl in the huddle at Royals Stadium late in the season Vs. Augsburg on Nov. 9. | SUBMITTED PHOTO

David Aamot on the sideline on Nov. 9 during a game vs. Hamline University. | PHOTO BY JHENNA BECKER



were approached by many coaches, but none left a first impression like Mike McElroy, better known as Coach Mac, from Bethel.

"He really wanted me to make the best decision for me and see what Bethel had to offer," Aamot said.

Bethel showed interest in both players but could not offer athletic scholarships. Liudahl received a scholarship offer to play at South Dakota School of Mines and both received offers to play at Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa.

After talking with coaches and family members, both Aamot and Liudahl decided to become Royals because of their belief in Bethel's culture.

For example, when you first walk into training camp as a freshman on most football teams, Aamot noted, you are typically ignored and overlooked.

"The first day of practice, Jake Marsh, a senior, high fived me and said, 'Good job, David,'" Aamot said. "That made me feel good, that a guy of his status already knew my name during the first drill, the first day of practice."

Bethel Head Football Coach Steve Johnson said that type of experience is planned on purpose, because the focus for a non-scholarship program like Bethel is to not only find good athletes, but good people, too.

"We want a bunch of guys

that love the Lord, love football, love each other, and we're going to have a stinking blast," Johnson said.

On the field, Johnson likes what he sees in both Landon and David so far.

"[Liudahl] is explosive. He's kind of got that Montana punch-you-in-the-nose stuff," Johnson said.

Liudahl showed this during his limited work in his first season, exploding through the line and outrunning a few defenders for a 63 yard touchdown during Bethel's 62-6 win over Augsburg University Nov. 9. After Liudahl reached the end zone, junior running back Sam Gibas, who was out with a hamstring injury, sprinted

to the middle of the field and hugged him.

As for David's skill set, Johnson describes him as "smooth" and someone who "runs great routes."

After growing up in the mountains of Montana, venturing to Minnesota for a combine and deciding to forgo scholarships to come to Bethel, Aamot and Liudahl found their second family nearly 1,000 miles from home.

"There's a difference in culture and kind of the feel of the [Bethel] locker room and the people," Aamot said. "It's definitely a closer and more tight knit group — more of a family feel." **C**



David Aamot

Year in school:

Freshman

Major:

Economics/Finance

Sport:

Football

Hometown:

Bozeman, MT

Favorites...

Pregame meal:

Fruit, hard boiled eggs, bacon

Video Game:

Fortnite

Athlete:

Aaron Rodgers

Movie:

Space Jam

Landon Liudahl

Year in school:

Freshman

Major:

Marketing/Digital Humanities

Sport:

Football

Hometown:

Bozeman, MT

Favorites...

Pregame meal:

Pasta

Hobbie:

Hunting, Skiing

Athlete:

Von Miller

Restaurant:

Olive Garden