

# Football trip focuses more on winning souls than on winning games

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Howard  
Payne  
University's  
football  
team meets  
with a team  
from  
Finland  
during a trip  
to  
Scandinavia.

## Football trip focuses more on winning souls than on winning games

**By Abram Choate**

*Howard Payne University*

BROWNWOOD—Howard Payne University's football team scored big on a recent 10-day trip to Sweden and Finland, but the victories that meant the most didn't happen on the gridiron.

The Howard Payne Yellow Jackets defeated the Swedish team, Tyresö Royal Crowns, 41-7, and the Finland Junior National Team, 68-0. But what mattered more to the Howard Payne athletes was having opportunities to share their lives and their Christian testimonies with European football players and fans.



Joey Renner carries the ball during one HPU's games in Scandinavia.

The NCAA permits member institutions to take trips to other countries once every three years, giving student-athletes experience outside of what would be a normal playing season. Teams are given extended time to practice for the trip in hopes that their experience will benefit the students-athletes, countries, and opposing teams, as well as further the exposure of the sport.

Howard Payne head football Coach Mike Redwine worked on planning this trip for his team for more than a year. Redwine is no stranger to that part of the world; as a player after college, he played for one of the Finnish teams. Additionally, later, as a coach, he took a group of players from Mid-America Nazarene University to play in Scandinavia.

“During the flight, I heard three of our players sharing their faith with complete strangers,” Redwine said. “This takes courage and a real sensitivity to God’s leading.”

The players stayed with host families for two nights in Sweden and were able to interact with the Swedish families and players. Most players thought that it would be very difficult communicating in Sweden and Finland, but many of the people they came in contact with spoke English or at least understood enough English to be able to communicate with them.

The Howard Payne team also helped instruct the Swedish and Finland players in practice. One of the days between their two games, the Howard Payne players had practice with the Swedish Djurgårdens football team as a service project. The HPU players led the Swedish players through individual drills.

“I was so excited watching the way our players took such pride in helping the Swedish players improve their skills,” said Redwine.

There are many things football players in America learn at a young age, and the Swedish and Finland players and coaches were eager to learn as much as they could about American football.

“My most memorable moment was when the coach from the Swedish team kept thanking me after I helped his right tackle pancake someone,” said James Freeman, Howard Payne offensive lineman,

After the game against the Finland Junior National Team, Redwine talked to the Finland players about Howard Payne University. HPU player Corbin Young was also able to share his testimony.

The Howard Payne players and staff also spent time in team devotions, with a different player sharing each day. “One of the highlights for me was our team devotionals,” Redwine commented. “While it really shouldn’t be this

way, sometimes we have to go clear around the world to sit down and be still long enough to really reflect and listen to God. In this case, God spoke through our players and through the natural beauty of Scandinavia.”

Many of the Howard Payne players came back talking about the beauty of Sweden and Finland. They were particularly impressed with the landscape and the architecture. “I loved the old buildings and architecture,” said Howard Payne player Ryan Robbins. “It is a beautiful place.”

Robbins, the only Howard Payne senior player to make the trip, played very well and was given an opportunity to return to play for the Finland professional team, the Kouvola Indians. Kouvola competes in Division I of the Finland professional league. Robbins spent just one week back in Texas before catching a plane flight back to Finland to start the season with the Indians.

“This is a wonderful opportunity,” said Ryan Robbins. “I am really looking forward to the experience.”