



The Swedish Approach to BFS

A look at the Arlanda Jets football program

BY **KIM GOSS, MS**

In the United States, football is football – but in other parts of the world, football is soccer and what we play is called American football. But American football is not a sport played exclusively in the United States, and interestingly enough, one of those other countries that have embraced our national pastime is Sweden.

The roots of American football in Sweden can be traced to young foreign

exchange students from Sweden who had been in the United States in the late '70s. They had little knowledge of the rules, and they used hockey gear for protection – just a bunch of young kids wanting to have fun. As American professional football became increasingly popular worldwide, more and more young Swedish kids started getting together with their friends and playing the game.

Sweden doesn't have organized school sports, but rather club sports. These clubs offer activities for all ages and at all times of the day, so sports often become a family affair, with parents and their children playing at the same time on separate courts and fields. Most kids play just one sport, but play it year-round. By 1982 the sport of American football had become so popular in Sweden that the first

American football club was formed that year. This was followed by the establishment of the Swedish American Football Federation in 1984, and in 1985 the first national championships was held.

To keep the games competitive, the sport is arranged in higher and lower divisions, so a player can move from weaker to stronger divisions based upon the player's performance. One Swedish football team that came to our attention recently, the Arlanda Jets, started with an "A-team" (age 20 and up) in 1989, and since then the Jets have grown to include more and more junior and youth teams. American football in Sweden includes teams in all age groups, as follows: U11, U13, U15, U17, U19 and A-team. They also started a team for women, and they have cheerleaders. The game is played using NCAA rules, and they even use yards instead of meters.

Getting on the Fast Track with the Arlanda Jets

The Arlanda Jets are located in an area of Stockholm called Märsta. The population of Märsta is about 30,000, compared to the 1 million living in Stockholm, and 9 million in all of Sweden – in terms of geography, Sweden is about the size of California.

The Jets' A-team plays in the highest division, which they call the "Super Series," but the crowds number in the hundreds, not thousands. As such it's a true amateur sport, with the players simply coming to play. Money is a bit tight as a result, so all the players must pay a membership fee and buy their own helmet and shoulder pads

– no hockey gear allowed. The playing season is May to September, but the Swedish schedule is quite different from the US, as there are no games played during July and often there are two- to three-week breaks between games.

"In our constant striving to improve we always have brought Americans to develop our game," says Arlanda Jets coach Thomas Andersson, who was a foreign exchange student in Michigan in the early '80s and today



Coaches Billy Kennedy and Thomas Andersson

helps to coach and promote the sport in Sweden. "First we brought players to help coach and play – great guys right out of college who stayed for the summer, when we play. We still bring players, but about 10 years ago we learned about Bill "BD" Kennedy, a football coach who had moved to Sweden with his wife. We recruited him, and he has been great for the club. He has been an important part of our continuous growth and improvement."

In addition to recruiting Kennedy, the Arlanda Jets also were able to bring in coach Rik Parker, who is now the head coach for the A-team and assists Kennedy with the younger players. "Rik is an old-school guy and really

professional," says Andersson. "He is good at many things, but we brought him here because he is a true coach – he teaches values and reminds us what is important in football."

The Jets have their own practice field and a weightroom, about 220 square yards under bleachers the club built. The weightroom includes five platforms, four being complete stations with approximately 330 pounds of weights for each station. They also

have dumbbells, various machines, and an area for plyometrics and agility work. They use the BFS Readiness program for the younger players. "The biggest challenge is getting them to understand how to work correctly," says Kennedy. "They want to see how much they can lift before they know how." After the Readiness program, the players progress to the BFS program.

"The biggest advantage of the BFS program is the teaching progression," says Kennedy. "It is a program that gives athletes the chance to develop from the learning phases of lifting to the advanced. It starts with the Readiness program in learning how to lift correctly. If you have developed the correct technique, then you have a much lower risk of injury as you get stronger." As for what he considers the best lifts for football, Kennedy responds, "I am a big believer in the squat and power clean, which lay down a great foundation for a player." Another aspect of the BFS program Kennedy likes is its built-in opportunity to break records. "The emphasis on record keeping and

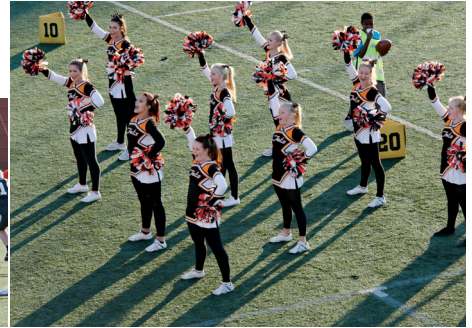
breaking personal records is a great way to keep athletes motivated.”

Kennedy says that with the combination of great facilities, a dedicated coaching staff, a sound workout system and players who are willing to work hard, the Arlanda Jets are producing

some very talented, strong and fast players, many of whom are being selected for national teams.

Although American football will probably never overtake the popularity of hockey in Sweden, the sport is growing in popularity thanks to the efforts of

dedicated coaches and numerous volunteers. And what is especially refreshing is that the athletes involved are not doing it for public recognition or financial incentives but for the love of the game. For these reasons, BFS is proud to be a part of the success of the Arlanda Jets. **BFS**



Sweden doesn't have organized school sports, but rather club sports. The Arlanda Jets were formed in 1989.



The Arlanda Jets have adopted the BFS program, focusing on breaking personal records every workout.

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