

## Swede football triumph over adversity

Written by Austin Benson

Wednesday, 27 November 2013 19:01 -

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Response to injuries a key.

To say the Gothenburg football team battled through adversity this season is an understatement.

Going into the year head coach Craig Haake said his defensive secondary was the team's deepest position, the offense would be led by a senior quarterback and the Swedes would play smash-mouth football.

Only one of those predictions remained true by the end of the season.

The Swedes caught the injury bug during the Cozad game Oct. 3, but the way his team responded may have been the most positive thing the Swedes did all season, Haake said.

He attributes part of the team's toughness to senior leader Skyler Kottwitz who said, "We might get knocked down but we will keep getting up."

The Swedes had no choice.

Before its Oct. 10 match-up with Chase County, coach Haake had to replace three starters in the secondary and needed a freshman quarterback to play every snap.

Kids were asked by the coaches and told by the players to step up—they did, Haake said.

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Gothenburg at the time was 3-2 coming off a 19-0 loss to Cozad but the guys stood up, brushed themselves off and battled to an 8-3 season that ended in the quarterfinals of the state playoffs.

Haake felt the season went well, although he wished he was preparing for the state title game during the wintry weather last Thursday, he said.

“We played the type of football that fit our team makeup,” Haake said. “We didn’t have many fast scores but we wore teams down and kept on the attack.”



The smash-mouth attack started up front with a line that improved each game, Haake said.

Haake moved Blake Ristine from quarterback to running back against Minden Sept. 27 and he had a breakout game.

An injury to reserve quarterback Jacob Clark left no option but for freshman Dawson Graham to step in and run the show, which he did.

Defensively, Haake was confident with the original starters and those that filled in because of the solid four on the defensive line.

“Everybody on our line caused the other teams problems,” Haake said. “The interior lineman forced double teams so our tackles and linebackers could make plays.”

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Behind the line, Swede linebackers had the ability to run, cover and were all solid tacklers, he said.

It's safe to say the Gothenburg team that started the season with a 20-7 loss to Ogallala was a different team at the end of the year.

They bonded together through the season, Haake said.

"Guys accepted roles they weren't accustomed to and it made us better," Haake said.

At the end of the season the Gothenburg squad could argue it was among the top in Class C-1.

It held the undefeated Cozad Haymakers to 19 points in their first meeting this season and played them tough again in the third round of state playoffs.

"The best team in our class is 10 miles down the road," Haake said. "We may get ranked low in the paper, but I think we are the second best team."

Junior Zach Wolf was the workhorse for the Swedes carrying the ball 180 times for 976 yards and nine touchdowns.

Senior Blake Ristine provided sparks on offense averaging 6.8 yards per rush and had 640 yards on the ground with seven touchdowns.

Through the air Ristine, Graham and Jacob Clark combined for 317 yards and six touchdowns.

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Wolf had the most yards receiving with 77 while Trenton Long led the team with two TD receptions.

Defensively the Swedes were led by Kottwitz with 118 tackles including 21 solos.

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