



## PHOTO & CAPTION

### Touchdown for Teamwork



Photo:ACDI/VOCA

***Serbian football players used full equipment for the first time in a tournament organized by two volunteer U.S. coaches with help from USAID. “The interest and enthusiasm the players had was remarkable,” said Eugene Felker, an American football coach who came to Serbia to train players in the country’s young national league.***

Playing football is a favorite American pastime. Bringing together players from diverse backgrounds, the game encourages teamwork and cooperation — the building blocks of strong communities. In Serbia, the game is gaining popularity — there is even a 10-team Serbian football league. But the league is still in its infancy. Larry Kentera and Eugene Felker, two American football coaches, have a lot of faith in the game and in the character it builds. For them, developing the country’s football league is a great way to build trust, community, and teamwork in a nation where ethnic and religious tensions are still palpable.

“Our wish was to help these young people enhance their knowledge and skills in football ...

the practice and advice will be useful to them,” explained Larry. Working with USAID, Larry and Eugene spent three weeks in Serbia, where they brought their expertise and advice to several teams in the football league, including the Kragujevac Wild Boars. “This was the first time we worked with professional American football coaches,” says Vladimir Lazic, one of the team’s players. “We used to design our practices based on data from the internet and watching games on television. I’m sure what we have learned during these weeks will be seen in our future play.” The work of Larry, Eugene, and the Wild Boars paid off quickly — the team won Serbia’s first national football championship. The teams, many of which had never played in full gear, also received much-needed equipment, including helmets, cleats, jerseys, shoulder pads, educational videos, and other items valued at \$150,000, all donated by American universities. “Thanks to the equipment we received, our play will be much safer ... Before, injuries were pretty frequent,” says Vladimir of the Wild Boars.

The Serbian football league now has nearly 500 players between the ages of 17-27. Larry sees a great future for Serbian football and its players. “They are full of energy, optimism and the desire for knowledge, which are the tickets for success,” he says. With help from US coaches and USAID, Serbia’s players are honing their skills while also learning the benefits of teamwork.