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Football's Austin Barnes Kickin' It for a Cause

EMU freshman punter helped make a difference to keep kids warm this winter



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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) — Eastern Michigan University punter [Austin Barnes](#) (**Fairview Heights, Ill.-O'Fallon**) not only made an impact on the field during his freshman season in Ypsilanti, he also made a difference in the lives of several area youths this winter. Barnes pledged to donate a coat for every punt he made during the 2013 season to a child in need.

On Friday, Dec. 6, Barnes followed through on that promise, delivering 50 coats to the Hope Clinic in Ypsilanti. The coats were donated by businesses and individuals from Barnes' hometown of Fairview Heights, Ill.

"Growing up I didn't have a lot and others helped us out when we were in need," said Barnes. "Now I feel it is my turn to help others. I feel God gave me this talent to use not only on the field but off the field as well. I hope this will inspire other young athletes to give back too. God gave us what we have for His ultimate purpose not ours."

"It was a tremendous blessing to receive this gift," said Naomi Williams a social worker at the Hope Clinic. "This year we have had a great demand for coats, gloves and hats beginning in October. Austin's donation had a significant impact on our ability to provide them."

Named a candidate for the 2013 Ray Guy Award, which honors the nation's top collegiate punter, Barnes finished the year with 50 punts for a total of 1,983 yards. He boasted a per punt average of 39.7 yards, an average that was 12th-best in EMU history for a single-season.

Barnes has always been active in his community. In high school, he started a fundraising drive called 'Kickin' it for Cans' which donated 10 cans of food to the local pantry for every kick made. In total, more than 4,000 canned goods were donated to the Fairview Heights Food Pantry following the 2012 season. Additionally, in the off-season, he has gone on mission trips to Joplin, Mo. (tornado victims) and Nashville, Tenn. (flood victims).

The Hope Clinic provided over 6,800 medical visits, 4,500 dental visits, filled \$2,600,885 worth of prescriptions, served 5,113 hot meals and gave out 12,466 bags of groceries in 2011 to the Ypsilanti community.

Barnes likes to use the analogy of the punts lasting between four and five seconds on the field, yet the results of that punt off the field cannot be measured. He already has aspirations for next year and will Kick It' for another cause that is still to be determined. People interested in finding out more can visit [Facebook.com/KickinItForCans](https://www.facebook.com/KickinItForCans)