

Wounded Warrior Project Puts Veterans on Ice at Hockey Boot Camp

NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, Texas, Sept. 9, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- As 2016 Stanley Cup celebrations are winding down, a new season is just on the horizon. But that does not mean the action on the ice has come to a complete stop, as a group of injured veterans learned during a recent hockey boot camp. The camp was hosted by Wounded Warrior Project® and the NYTEX Sports Centre, home of the NAHL Lone Star Brahmas.

Hockey director Knute Anderson; Frank Trazzera, president and owner of the Lone Star Brahmas; and parents and players of the Texas Junior Brahmas hockey team greeted warriors when they arrived at the ice rink. The parents and junior players assisted participants by providing hydration and helping them gear up in skates, pads, and helmets.

"It was like talking to old squad mates, knowing they care as much about your recovery and journey as you do about them," said Army veteran Kevin Holland. "As I was putting on the gear, I was reliving my old days as a warrior, and suiting up for hockey felt a bit like suiting up for a mission – complete with the butterflies. It's a feeling few people can relate to. I found myself forgetting about everything for a few hours and enjoying a fun time with fellow veterans – and that's pretty cool."

WWP staff closely interacted with injured warriors over the course of the afternoon, advising them of additional services and personalized therapeutic outlets to assist in recovery. Like WWP outreach gatherings, these program resources are available through the generosity of donors so activities can be offered to wounded warriors free of charge.

"WWP was made for us – it belongs to us," Kevin said. "We have a word in everything WWP stands for and what it does. It is a fantastic resource and an incredible organization. If you are eligible to be a warrior, then you owe it to yourself and your family to see what they're all about."

Equipped and ready to play, the wounded veterans took to the ice, where they received basic instructions on gameplay and skating. Because skill levels ranged from some who currently play in amateur leagues to others who had never put on a pair of skates, the group was divided into three zones – beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

"I grew up playing pond hockey in upper Michigan," said Marine veteran Ryan Eman. "It was just part of life there in that area of the U.S. I have always loved hockey and wanted to get back into it. But before this, I never really had the reason or motivation to."

"For me, it was way out of my comfort zone," Kevin said. "I was apprehensive because of my injuries, so I took it slow and relied on the other warriors and staff to keep me safe. It felt great to be on the ice, and I really appreciated that the coaches, players, and WWP staff paid attention to all the different skill sets so no one felt left out."

Coaches and Junior Brahmas players worked closely with the warriors, helping them with defensive and offensive skating techniques, puck handling, and making shots on goal. The level of attention they paid to the warriors made a big difference to first-time player James Williams, an Army recruiting center leader who signed

up for the event so his daughter could see him play.

"I enjoyed the players' and coaches' interaction, giving us one-on-one instruction with the utmost professionalism," he said. "The motivation and positive reinforcement made all the difference. They took us in as their own."

The hockey boot camp, along with a variety of other engaging program activities, supports the recovery needs of warriors by reintroducing them to the bonds forged during military service. Encouraging warriors to recapture that military spirit with their peers helps prevent isolation.

"It's a great way to connect with other warriors who have the same struggles and issues," said Marine veteran Jarrod Tallman. "At WWP gatherings like this we can compete with and also help one another."

About Wounded Warrior Project

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. The WWP purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit woundedwarriorproject.org.

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