

Wounded Veterans Take Swings at PNC Park

Wounded Warrior Project and Pittsburgh Pirates Host a Different Kind of Ballgame

PITTSBURGH (July 13, 2021) – Air National Guard veteran Leo Robert had never played in a virtual home run derby. So when he stepped up to the “plate” and gripped his Playstation® controller inside PNC Park, home of MLB’s Pittsburgh Pirates, he was not sure what to expect.

“It was a lot of fun,” Leo said.

He found the experience a novel way to bond over baseball with around 20 other veterans, most from the immediate Pittsburgh area. For some, the experience brought back memories.

“My dad used to bring me to Pirates games when I was growing up,” said Army veteran Delia Veschi.

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) brought Delia, Leo, and the other warriors together at the ballpark to rekindle the bonds veterans lose when they leave service.

“It’s been amazing getting to see everyone again,” Delia said.

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“Working with the Pirates has been an absolute gem,” said James Martin, a Marine veteran and WWP staff member who helped organize the event. “To get the warriors to come together, to see the joy on their face, to hear them see friends of old, and watch new friendships kindle and become something, to see how much these things matter.”

WWP knows how important it is to help veterans connect. Events like this virtual home run derby help get warriors out of the house. WWP can then educate the men and women about mental health programs and other free support.

Jeff Gryzyb is a Marine Corps veteran who joined a friend at the event.

“It’s good to hear other people’s stories, where they are from, and how they got to know the Wounded Warrior Project,” Jeff said.

The warriors also had a chance to connect with Pirates pitcher Steven Brault. He joined the group via video conference. He answered questions, recorded a video greeting for a warrior's little league son, and led everyone in singing happy birthday to another warrior.

The key to the day, though, was the home run derby.

"When you are playing video games, it is fun and competitive, just having a good time and enjoying the day," Jeff said.

Leo claimed the title, a signed jersey from Steven, and bragging rights.

"Thank you, it was fun, great food, and it was great beating all of you," Leo told the other warriors in jest.

"No matter how old you are, everyone has their kid at heart; it's been awesome to watch," James said.

Contact: Rob Louis — Public Relations, rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.627.0432

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn more.](#)

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