

## Air Force Print News Today

Air Force news from around the world

### Air Commandos rally against Mobile Patriots, fall short 60-57

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10/7/2010 - HURLBURT FIELD, Fla. -- The Aderholt Fitness Center staff had seen plenty of basketball action in the last week, but nothing like this.

Just days after supporting the Miami HEAT for their 2010 Training Camp, Hurlburt Field hosted the Mobile Patriots during the fifth annual Wheelchair Basketball Exhibition Game at the Aderholt Fitness Center Oct. 4.

The Air Commandos nearly edged the Mobile Patriots, a Gulf Coast division three National Wheelchair Basketball Association team, at their own game but fell short 60-57 during the game held in recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness month.

"We pay tribute to the accomplishments of those men and women with disabilities whose work helps keep America's defense and economy strong," said Col. Michael Plehn, 1st Special Operations Wing commander, in a proclamation read by Col. Dale Agner, 1st Special Operations Medical Group commander. "I hereby call upon leadership and all hiring authorities to look past an applicant's disabilities and focus on potential."

Many of the same conditions in basketball, like rules against traveling and fouling, still apply to this version of the sport. Of course, the major difference is that the players are strapped into a wheelchair for the duration of the game.

Despite having a home court advantage and being spotted 20 points at the beginning of the game, the Air Commandos had to overcome not only adjusting to playing in a wheelchair but their four-year losing streak to the Patriots.

When the Patriots' Rob Roberts sank the first basket within the opening eight seconds of the game, it seemed destined to be a repeat of their past matches. The Patriots soon tied the Air Commandos with three minutes left in the first quarter, but a shot from Maj. Adonis Arvanitakis, 19th Special Operations Squadron, showed the home team had no intention of calling it quits.

"It's pretty cool to experience this because, while it's hard to play in a wheelchair, you get an insight into what these guys go through every day," said Senior Airman Wes Carter, 1st Special Operations Logistics Readiness Squadron vehicle operator. "They put up a good fight, plus we're all having fun."

With a 26-22 lead going into the second quarter, the Patriots broke precedent by trading players with the Air Commandos. Col. Curt Van de Walle, 1st Special Operations Mission Support Group commander, and Major Arvanitakis switched their blue jerseys for white ones with the Patriots' Bryan Lynde and Mr. Roberts, who already scored 12 points in the game.

The change shook up more than the rosters as the integrated defenses ensured the leads would fluctuate between the teams. And rather than spin circles around their opponents while taking the lead, the Patriots often provided ample opportunities for their Air Force counterparts to attempt to score on their own.

Tech. Sgt. Derek McKay, 1st Special Operations Force Support Squadron, tied the game at 36 with just 45 seconds left in the first half. A buzzer-beating attempt to take the lead by Mr. Roberts bounced off the backboard, but the Air Commandos went into half-time with a draw for the first time ever.

"They moved the ball for us and gave us plenty of opportunities to succeed," said Lt. Col. Robert Bandstra,



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Michael Sullivan (left), 19th Special Operations Squadron, goes up for a jump ball against Kenny Lee of the Mobile Patriots during the fifth annual Wheelchair Basketball Exhibition Game at the Aderholt Fitness Center at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Oct. 4, 2010. The Air Commandos hosted the Mobile Patriots, a Gulf Coast division three National Wheelchair Basketball Association team, in recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness month. (DoD photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephanie Jacobs/RELEASED)

801st Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron commander. "But the hoop is a lot higher than what you think it is. You have to put an extra arch on it just so you can be where these guys play. They have this absolutely mastered."

The third quarter featured more of the Patriots setting up shots for the Air Commandos. But with their teammates hitting air more than the net, the Patriots took the lead in the low-scoring quarter at 44-38.

The visitor's offense never let up in the fourth quarter as they kept driving the ball to their end of the court, scoring eight baskets to Hurlburt Field's three.

While the game ended with the Patriots besting the home team 60-44, both teams agreed to a fifth quarter to give more of their players a chance to play. The Air Commandos, with a more-than-fair mix of their Mobile teammates, went on a 13-0 run to bring the final score to 60-57.

"This was absolutely awesome," said Phillip Eddins, Mobile Patriots. "It got a bit close at times, and everything stayed competitive."

However large or small his team's lead over his opponents became, Mr. Roberts said he enjoyed sharing the court with special operations Airmen.

"We try to make it fun for everybody," he said. "This has been a great opportunity, and we're glad we're allowed to do it."

Regardless of losing at home for the fifth year in row, Air Commandos like Tech. Sgt. James Speight, 1st Special Operations Force Support Squadron, said they were grateful to learn new skills while underscoring the talents and potential of Americans with disabilities.

"It gives you a whole new appreciation," Sergeant Speight said. "It made me think of the things I take for granted, and how no disability can stop these guys from doing what they're doing. It shows how they're still having fun, and how life doesn't end."

The Patriots are a non-profit team formed in 1984 to highlight the talents of physically-challenged athletes. The team ranked fourth place in the country and has finished in the top 25 teams in America over the last 10 years.