

Wounded Warriors to Take Part in Invictus Games Orlando 2016

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By Shannon Leonard, Navy Installations Command Public Affairs

Nine seriously wounded, ill and injured athletes participated in a sitting volleyball demonstration and announcement of the Invictus Games Orlando 2016 onboard the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum Dec. 3, in New York City.

Retired Navy Aircrewman Brett Parks - a lower-leg amputee who was shot when he tried to stop an armed robbery in 2012 - and Retired Aviation Electrician Mate 3rd Class Michael Roggio - who was injured while on duty in 2009 - represented the Navy during the joint-service sitting volleyball demonstration. Parks and Roggio are enrolled in Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW)--Safe Harbor, the Navy's wounded warrior support program.

President George W. Bush and Ken Fisher, chairman and chief executive officer of Invictus Games 2016, were met with great excitement when they arrived during the sitting volleyball demonstration on the ship's flight deck. The wounded warrior athletes stopped the game to greet them with hugs and handshakes. Bush and Fisher then publicly announced that the former President will serve as honorary chair of Invictus Games Orlando 2016.

Additionally, the George W. Bush Institute and the Invictus Games 2016 will co-chair a policy symposium prior to the Games, which will take place May 8-12, 2016. The Dallas-based institute is launching a major initiative to address the invisible wounds of war, specifically traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress, to ensure veterans and caregivers seek and receive comprehensive care and reduce the stigma associated with these wounds.

"I have dedicated the rest of my life to honoring the service and sacrifice of the men and women with whom I served as Commander-in-Chief," said Bush. "Those who wear their Nation's uniform, some of whom have been overcome both visible and invisible injuries, deserve our support. I'm proud to serve as honorary chairman of the Invictus Games 2016, and to shine a spotlight on the unconquered spirit of these men and women, not just from the American team but from 15 Coalition nations."

The Invictus Games Orlando 2016 will bring together more than 500 veteran competitors from 15 nations to compete in 10 adaptive sports: archery, cycling, indoor rowing, sitting volleyball, swimming, track and field, powerlifting, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, and wheelchair tennis. The Games will shine a light on the healing power of adaptive sports for seriously wounded, ill, and injured service members. A number of seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors are expected to compete on behalf of Team USA.

"The highlight today for me was President Bush. He is the reason why I joined the military. He gave the call out and I answered it. It meant a lot to me to be able to shake his hand and give him a hug. You can tell he genuinely cares about wounded warriors. It was a great event and a great day," said Parks, an avid athlete who participated in Invictus Games 2014 in London.

"Today was a great day. It inspired me to keep pushing forward and pursue my dreams. Without the struggles, dreams wouldn't be here. Dreams can become reality. I am pushing to make the U.S. team for Invictus Games 2016 and I hope to be a medalist," said retired Army sergeant Robbie Gaupp.

During an assignment in the U.S. to support Operation Jumpstart, Gaupp shattered his right shoulder while assisting border patrol units along the Texas-Mexico border. After he was introduced to adaptive sports, he advanced to the Department of Defense Warrior Games, where he earned medals of every color. Gaupp was one of three soldiers to take part in the sitting volleyball demonstration and announcement.

The event was coordinated by NWW, which provides non-medical care to Sailors and Coast Guardsmen who are wounded in combat, diagnosed with serious illnesses, and injured in shipboard, training and liberty accidents. NWW is one of many quality of life programs for which Commander, Navy Installations Command is responsible.