



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

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From battlefield to football field: Ohio Army National Guard partners with NFL to develop youth

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CLEVELAND—Soldiers with the Ohio Army National Guard, in conjunction with the NFL and select members of the Indiana Army National Guard, presented the National 7-on-7 Tournament July 9 in Cleveland.

The three-day event culminated the year's iteration of the NFL's High School Player Development program.

The National Guard and the NFL began working with the high school players months earlier. Coaches at schools across the country apply to participate in the program and are then given the materials to complete a character development curriculum required before any player can hit the field for the NFL's HSPD program. Those attributes, not football skills, are what the program is primarily designed to build.

Jerry Horowitz, director of the HSPD with the NFL, said while four or five of the players that make it to the national tournament might eventually progress to the NFL, it

is a very small portion of all the young men who are exposed to the character development lessons the program is designed to instill.

“We run (the program) because every one of those ... kids will be entering society,” he said. “We like to think as they enter society, they will take more of a leadership role as a result of the life lessons and character development that are constantly being driven home from both the NFL’s point of view and from the National Guard’s point of view.

“We felt this was just a match made in heaven,” he said. “Our core values are exactly the same core values of the National Guard.”

It is at the schools and the regional camps during the months leading up to the national tournament that the National Guard has the greatest impact on the players. Soldiers with recruiting and retention battalions across the country help with practices and serve as mentors to the players.

Sgt. 1st Class Todd Everett, a recruiter with Company E, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Ohio Army National Guard, said in his three years as a mentor with the program, he’s seen Soldiers assist with tasks as simple as retrieving loose footballs during practice to more elaborate tasks such as setting up obstacle courses and offering Humvees for the players to push, testing their physical strength and stamina, as well as building teamwork.

DeShawn Dowdy, a senior at North High School in Akron, participated in the program for the first time this year. He said he noticed teamwork development the most. Everyone was a little shy at first, but they started operating smoothly together very quickly.

Dowdy also said he appreciated the perspective of playing with so many other uniquely talented players. It forces you to learn how to slow down and see your role as only one element working cooperatively toward the greater team goal.

Horowitz said he has told the members of the participating recruiting and retention battalions they aren't going to develop recruiting leads – they'll develop valuable relationships with players like Dowdy that will pay tremendous dividends down the road – the participating high school players learn life skills not for a day, but for a lifetime.

Sgt. Maj. Jerry Coleman, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the north region recruiting team with the Ohio Army National Guard, said those players will become allies for the National Guard as they grow into adulthood. The positive influence those players see now will strengthen and preserve the positive National Guard image in the future.

Col. John C. Harris, Ohio's assistant adjutant general for Army, urged the players in Cleveland to ask themselves what they will do with their talent and the life skills acquired through the HSPD program.

The country will need their leadership, he said.

Harris emphasized perseverance through adversity and left the attentive players with two words quoted from former President Calvin Coolidge...Press on.

Horowitz said the program teaches the young men valuable skills about how to act as a person to create better opportunities and its goal is to expand that message to all 1.2 million high school football players across the country.

"When you link the NFL shield with the National Guard, you're going to get people to (listen)," he said.



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High school football players round out a year's participation in the NFL's High School Player Development Program July 10, 2011, during the National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at the Cleveland Browns practice facility in Berea, Ohio. The semifinals and championship game were played at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)



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An Ohio Army National Guard color guard presents the national and state colors July 10, 2011, during the national anthem before the championship game for the NFL's National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)



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Ellen Baker, the reigning Miss Ohio, sings the national anthem July 10, 2011, before the championship game for the NFL's National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)



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Col. John C. Harris, Ohio's assistant adjutant general for Army, tosses an Ohio National Guard coin July 10, 2011, before the championship game for the NFL's National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)



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High school football players round out a year's participation in the NFL's High School Player Development Program July 10, 2011, during the National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)



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Col. John C. Harris, Ohio's assistant adjutant general for Army, speaks to high school football players July 10, 2011, after the NFL's 2011 National 7-on-7 Tournament presented by the National Guard at Cleveland Browns Stadium. (Ohio National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Randall P. Carey)

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: The Ohio National Guard Public Affairs Office at 614-336-7000. Please visit the Ohio National Guard website at <http://ong.ohio.gov>.