

Coach brings basketball to soldiers in Kuwait

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Green Wave men's basketball head coach Ed Conroy participated in Operation Hardwood Classic, a basketball tournament organized as a morale event for troops in Kuwait. (Photo by Parker Waters)

Camp Arifjan, Kuwait ? Xs and Os, wins and losses. When it comes to sports, particularly college sports, what else is there to measure about a team's leader? Well, how about the choice of how to spend the offseason?

Tulane men's basketball head coach [Ed Conroy](#) made his way to Kuwait in mid-August to coach and mentor service members in Operation Hardwood Classic, a basketball tournament organized as a morale event for the past 10 years. Along with

seven other current and former college basketball coaches, Conroy visited Camp Arifjan, which is home to U.S. Army Central Command and Combined Joint Task Forceâ€”Operation Inherent Resolve.

Relatively speaking, Kuwait is a safe country in a region that is gripped by daily turmoil and constant insurgent fighting. However, as local citizens learned in June with the suicide bombing of a Shiite mosque that killed 27 people and injured more than 200 others, there are no safe zones. By agreeing to participate, Conroy and the others placed themselves in some risk to get here.

Still, for all who took part in the tournament, most of whose dreams of playing basketball before large college crowds dissipated years ago, the coaches' visit is likely to be the highlight of their year, perhaps even their adult life. And for those deployed here who got to see a familiar face with a familiar name, it was a taste of home. For troops from the Gulf Coast, it was especially welcome with the approach of the Hurricane Katrina anniversary.

Other coaches who participated were Dino Gaudio (ESPN analyst, former head coach, Wake Forest), Pete Gillen (CBS sports analyst, former head coach, Virginia), Greg Kampe (Oakland University), Steve Lavin (Fox Sports analyst, former head coach, St. John's), Reggie Minton (deputy executive director, National Association of Basketball Coaches, former head coach, Air Force), Jimmy Patsos (Siena College) and Gary Stewart (Stevenson University).

By the way, Conroy's team won the tournament.

Major David E. Leiva, a 2003 alumnus, is a former Tulane communications staff member and now the future plans and operations officer at U.S. Army Central Command, National Guard Affairs, in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. He sends this note to Green Wave fans: "Roll Wave!"