

Dept. of Military Affairs: Milwaukee Bucks scores winning play with families of deployed Wisconsin Guard members

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MILWAUKEE, Wis. — A National Basketball Association (NBA) point guard brought a little holiday warmth and cheer to families of deployed service members on a cold wintry Dec. 17 day.

George Hill of the Milwaukee Bucks, along with his wife, children and friends, brought Christmas gifts for more than 50 children of 31 families whose Soldier is deployed with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) headquarters element to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti.

"I just want to say thank you guys for giving me the opportunity to come here," Hill said at the Wisconsin National Guard's Richards Street Armory on Milwaukee's north side. "I know during the holidays it can get tough not having family around."

Hill also posed for photos with family members and signed memorabilia during his visit. While being careful not to compare his NBA schedule with military service, he said being on the road and away from his family during holidays helps him appreciate the sacrifice service members experience on a regular basis.

"Your service members help keep us safe, and give us the opportunity to play basketball," Hill said. "This is a small token of appreciation."

Andrea Paulson — whose husband, Spc. Blake Paulson, is an information technology specialist deployed with the 157th — had attended Hill's G3 Holiday Bash to benefit

Wish for Our Heroes the previous night.

"It's so neat to see him hands-on in the community, giving back," Paulson said. "I just have so much respect for that."

Paulson, an Oconomowoc, Wisconsin resident, said her family are big Milwaukee Bucks fans.

"Oh my gosh, I can't even tell you how much this hits home for us," she said. "We're just a big basketball family."

Paulson said her family was doing "fairly well" during the deployment. She said she talks frequently with a military-specific life coach so that she does not bring her frustrations to her deployed husband or her two children.

"That's been helpful," she said.

Though her parents have deployed multiple times in the past, this is the first such experience for 9-year-old Lillian Staab of Windsor, Wisconsin. Her mother, Maj. Joy Staab, is deployed with the 157th MEB.

"I wasn't alive" for her parents' prior deployments, Lillian explained. Her father Jason, a Wisconsin Army National Guard veteran, is able to help her understand what her mother is doing overseas.

"Certain times it's been hard, certain times it's been okay," Lillian said. "I'm happy right now."

Hill said that it's always important to give back to the community, but even more so to the families of deployed service members.

"Those men and women are gone for the holidays and their families are here trying to make things work," Hill said. "Christmas without both parents can be a burden, so we're trying to lift that burden off them a little bit. They're not alone, and we're thinking about them."