

Beat: Sports

INVICTUS GAMES OPENS IN LONDON

WOUNDED WARRIORS

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USPA NEWS - 10 September 2014 ““ The Opening Ceremony of the first ever Invictus Games, presented by Jaguar Land Rover, took place this evening, marking the start of the highly anticipated international sports competition for “wounded warriors” in London.

PRINCE HARRY HOSTS OPENING CEREMONY OF INSPIRATIONAL GAMES FOR “WOUNDED WARRIORS”

Watching in the stand was Prince Harry who launched the event in March this year. Alongside him were the Prince of Wales, Duchess of Cornwall and the Duke of Cambridge. 6,500 people gathered on the South Lawn of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park for the military-themed ceremony also broadcast live on BBC’s The One Show. The event roared into life with a spectacular Red Arrows fly-past after a short rendition of the national anthem by the Band of the Irish Guards, the Central Band of the RAF, and the Band of Her Majesty’s Royal Marines, Collingwood.

Singer Laura Wright took to the stage followed by actor Idris Elba who recited “Invictus”, the famous 1875 poem by William Ernest Henley that proclaims strength in the face of adversity. The spirit of the poem’s poignant closing lines “I am the captain of my soul; I am the master of my fate”, can be seen in the “I AM” emblem of the Invictus Games which celebrate what these men and women can achieve, post-injury. Later the flag bearers moved into the “I AM” formation that could be seen from aerial views on camera.

A parade of all 416 athletes taking part in nine sports over coming days followed, with competitors from Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Georgia, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand and the USA. The 130-strong British Armed Forces team entered last to rapturous applause from the crowd. There was also a fly-past by helicopters, a rifle demonstration by the Queen’s Colour Squadron and displays by The King’s Troop Royal Horse Artillery.

In a video message First Lady Michelle Obama said: “Some of the most inspiring moments I have had as 1st Lady are when I’ve met wounded warriors like so many of you. You tell me that you’re not just going to recover but that you’re going to thrive. You tell me you’re not just going to walk but you’re going to run marathons. I’ve seen that resilience and drive first hand at the Warrior Games here in the United States and I know people are thrilled that the spirit of those Games will thrive across the pond in the first ever Invictus Games. So to all of the competitors here today I just want you to know how incredible you are.

You’re inspiring all of us, especially our young people. Inspiring them to believe that if we dig deeper, if we work harder and confront the adversity in our own lives with just a fraction of the courage you show every day, there is nothing we can’t achieve.

“To all the family members and care givers in the audience, I want you to know that your courage doesn’t go unnoticed either. These heroes wouldn’t be here today without you.

So I want to thank everyone involved in the Invictus Games, especially the Royal Foundation, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry for sharing these stories of strength and determination with the world. And while I can’t hide that I hope that Team USA won’t bring home a few gold medals, I want you all to know how proud my husband and I are of you and how humbled we are by your example. So good luck everybody and have fun out there.”^[2]

She welcomed Prince Harry to the stage.

Prince Harry said: “Over the past eight years, I have witnessed the whole cycle of life changing injury; evacuating soldiers and local Afghans to hospital; flying home from Afghanistan with some of those critically injured; meeting others in Hospital coming to terms with life changing injuries; and finally trying to keep up with twelve wounded veterans on our way to the South Pole. I can only begin to imagine how challenging the journey of recovery is, but the admiration I have for these men and women, to move beyond their injuries, is limitless.

Last year, through The Royal Foundation, I visited the Warrior Games in the United States. Seeing people who, only months earlier, had been told they’d never walk again, now winning medals in front of their family and friends was breath-taking. I knew that anyone would be inspired by what these men and women had achieved, not just other Servicemen and women, but all those adjusting to life

post injury. Each of them have come such a long way; even making it to the start line is a huge achievement.

"Their stories are as amazing, as they are unique. However, they all share one thing "" sport. Sport has been the vehicle for their recovery, allowing them to channel their passion into what can be achieved, rather than what can't. No longer are these inspirational men and women defined by their injury but as athletes, competitors and team mates. Over the next four days we will see some truly remarkable achievements. For some of those taking part, this will be a stepping stone to elite sport but for others it will mark the end of a chapter in their recovery, and the beginning of a new one. Either way, you can be sure that, everyone who takes to the track, pool or field of play will be giving it their all.

I have no doubt that lives will be changed this weekend. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the thirteen nations to London and to say how delighted I am that many of you are joined by your families, recognising the vital part they play in your recovery. The British public's support for our Service men and women has been exceptional; I know they will show you the same over the coming days. Finally, I would like to thank you for the tremendous example you set. Your stories move, inspire and humble us. You prove that anything is possible, if you have the will. Welcome to the Games. Welcome to Invictus."

The Opening Ceremony closed with a performance of Invictus Anthem penned by Coldplay's Chris Martin, by Tri-Service Male Singers, Urban Voices Choir and Service Bands. Yellow confetti fired from cannons as the big screens showed some of the inspirational stories of just some of the 400+ wounded, injured and sick Servicemen and women, serving and veteran and from 13 nations that have served alongside one another, who are taking part in the Invictus Games, presented by Jaguar Land Rover.

Earlier in the ceremony Sir Keith Mills, Chairman of the Invictus Games Organising Committee, said: "This evening we welcome the competitors and their friends and families from 13 countries. Over the next few days we will experience some fantastic support from some extraordinary competitors. I wish them the very best of luck. Preparing for any major sports competition can be really tough, but the journey that these guys have travelled in recent months and years to simply be here tonight has been truly amazing.

When Prince Harry conceived the Invictus Games he hoped they would be an inspiration for all those that had been wounded, injured and become sick whilst serving their countries "" I have no doubt these Games will achieve that and much more. They will inspire the tens of thousands of spectators in the stadiums this week in London. They will inspire the millions around the world that will watch these Games on television or online and they will inspire all those in the armed forces around the world that serve their countries so that we may be safe.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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