

## Warriors

Continued from Page 65

Cook drove his "Golf Xpress" single-rider cart to a spot on the range next to a shiny pyramid of golf balls, and then rotated his seat 90 degrees to face the stack. Rising from the seat, Cook hopped on his left foot and used a six-iron to fish a ball from the top of the pyramid. Then he hopped into swinging position.

"I've never done this before," he said, still hopping. Balancing himself, Cook began his backswing. His club shaft was nearly parallel to the ground before he drove the iron toward the ball.

Upon contact, a large, earthy divot flew almost as far as the ball. Then Cook launched a low, line drive that hooked into the trees just off the fairway for his second shot.

On his third swing, Cook hit a picture-perfect iron shot that sailed straight down the range and rolled near the black-and-white checkered flag marking 120 yards.

"Now I liked that one," Cook said after firing off an equally clean drive that breezed well past the checkered flag. "I could do this every day."

Willard took a break from instructing to sneak in a few shots using a six-iron he gripped with his prosthetic device. He then stepped back and observed the other golfers' progress. "It's not here or here that's important," Willard said, pointing to his arm then to his leg.

Motioning towards his heart, he said, "It's about what's in here."

# Gridiron greets visit troops in Iraq

**SPC. JEFFREY LEDESMA**

*1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs Office*

WASHINGTON — To increase troops' morale, three National Football League players, weighing in at a combined 662 pounds, set aside their football gear for a trip to Iraq to visit with Multinational Division Baghdad Soldiers April 16.

As part of the Gridiron Greats Tour 2007, Chris Harris, a safety with the Chicago Bears, Nick Harper, a cornerback with the Indianapolis Colts, and Israel Idonije, a defensive end with the Chicago Bears, autographed everything from posters to footballs for the Soldiers.

One behind the other, Soldiers filed into the Liberty Morale, Welfare and Recreation building to get closer than 50-yard-line seats could get them to the three Super Bowl XLI players wearing desert tan and Army green camouflage gear.

"It's motivational for people, especially people we label celebrities, that seem above everybody else, to just come out and condone what we do and say 'We support you,'" said Sgt. Robert Harbour, a signal support systems specialist with Company A, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division.

"It gives everybody a chance to meet people you don't usually run into when you're back home," said Harbour, a native of Broken Bow, Okla.

"These players understand what

(Soldiers) are doing and they understand how (they) are serving and they want to give back to the community, the greater community of the Army," said Joe Canfield, the manager of the three players.

Although they arrived here to raise the spirits of the Soldiers fighting in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the players departed with a glimpse of what it means to be a Soldier.

"It's been an eye-opener to see what Soldiers go through, where they stay, how they live," Idonije said. "The unbelievable amount of courage and sacrifice and dedication that these guys have — it's unbelievable."

During the 6-foot-6-inch player's stay, he got a chance to talk to young men and women and hear some of their stories.

"Stories about losing friends and how they manage to go back out and continue to do their jobs everyday are truly inspirational," he said.

Idonije added that back home, media can be very negative and although many people want to support Soldiers, not many people take that extra step to see what's really happening on the ground.

For this African-born, Canadian-grown football player, this tour has allowed him to see and experience what's happening on the ground using the Soldiers as his eyes into this war.

"Being out here and having exposure to the military, exposure to the

Soldiers, allows them to go back and share the good things that are going on here," Canfield said. "We know the media doesn't always promote the welfare of the Soldier or promote the image.

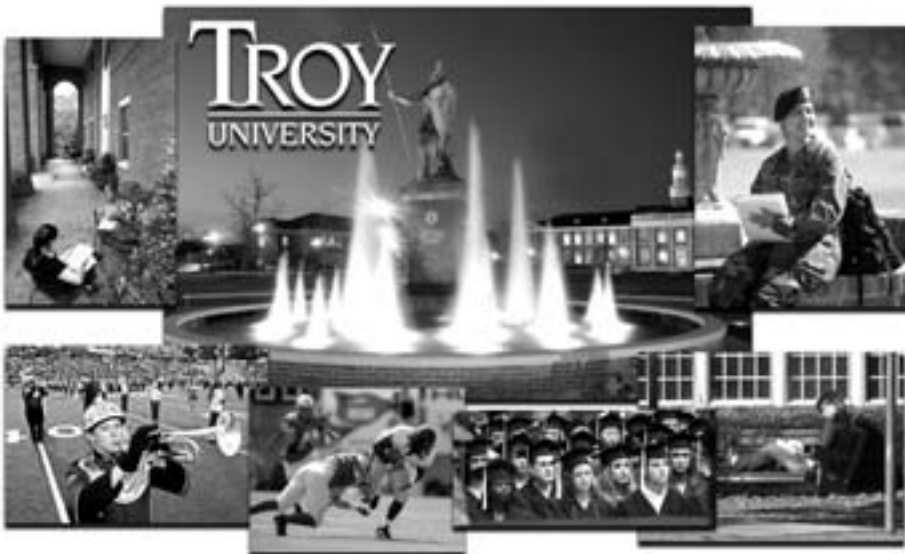
"These guys can go back to their fellow athletes, their fellow teams, the NFL, their friends and family and share the good things that are occurring and promote a positive image of the Army overall," Canfield said.

With the recent announcement of extended tours for troops on the ground, these professional athletes had an even greater task at hand.

"It gives them a greater responsibility to be more energetic, more active and raise the morale of the troops who just realized they are staying here for another three months," Canfield said.

Harbour said all the small things, something as small as a handshake or a snapshot, can make a difference by helping Soldiers keep their minds off the sudden, but expected, three-month extension.

"In times of war, it takes special people to come together and do what's necessary to stand for what's right, what we believe in as a people," Idonije said. "I am not here every day crossing the wire, so for me to be able just to hang out with the guys and thank them personally is an honor I am grateful for."



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