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News Release

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The IU Kokomo Cougars honored veterans and active duty service members with its Military Appreciation Night.

IU Kokomo freshman balances basketball, National Guard service

KOKOMO, Ind. – Jake Howdeshell has been part of a team his whole life.

This week his two most important teams — Indiana University Kokomo men’s basketball and the Army National Guard – came together, as the basketball team hosted Military Appreciation Night.

Howdeshell, a freshman from Fulton, was excited to share his military experience with his basketball teammates.

“The U.S. military is one of the biggest teams I’ll ever be on,” he said. “It allows our basketball team to express our gratitude to the members of the military, who make it possible for us to do things like play basketball. We have our freedoms because of the men and women who serve our country.”

The team played its game against IU Northwest wearing camouflage uniforms, to mark to occasion, and offered free admission to all veterans and active duty military. It was the least they could do to show their appreciation and respect, Coach Jace Thompson said.

“IU Kokomo’s region is home to many veterans and people currently serving our country,” he said. “This is a way we can give back to them, and thank them for all they do for us. Many of our fans are veterans, and we appreciate their service.”

Howdeshell is the first athlete Thompson has coached who is doing double duty, playing on a team and serving in the National Guard.

“We look forward to having Jake become a leader of our team during the next four years,” he said. “As a freshman, he already shows many qualities of a great leader, and his work with the National Guard will only help him continue to develop those skills.”

Howshedell grew up planning to serve, following in the footsteps of his father and other relatives, but he also wanted to earn a college degree. The National Guard allows him to do both.

“The guard helps me pay for school, so I don’t have to use my mom and dad’s money,” he said. “I get paid to be a full time student, a basketball player, and I get to be a soldier. It’s a win-win for me.”

It can be challenging balancing those three responsibilities, but his coach and his military supervisors have worked with him to make it possible.

“The National Guard wants me to have the college experience, and the sports life,” he said. “They understand that I have obligations to this team and theirs, and they help me balance it. I’m dedicated to basketball and putting myself through school with the National Guard. Both teams want me to graduate, and that helps. I don’t have a lot of free time outside of those, but it’s definitely worth it.”

He plans a career in the Army after earning a degree in criminal justice.

“I’m already starting to love it,” he said. “This is something I want to do with my life.”

The Cougars beat the RedHawks in overtime, 97-92.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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