



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USO Tour Veteran Alex Mack Teams Up With Akiem Hicks, Will Svitek and Brian Banks for his Second USO/NFL Tour Abroad

NFL players currently visiting six bases and spending quality time with troops in three countries in just one week

ARLINGTON, VA (Mar. 12, 2015) – In celebration of creating #USOMoments around the world for the past 49 years, the USO and the NFL have once again teamed up and deployed their first official USO/NFL tour of 2015. This year's moment-filled USO/NFL tour, which is currently visiting remote military bases in Africa and the Middle East, features Cleveland Browns center/two-time USO tour veteran **Alex Mack**. Teaming up with the 6 foot 4 inch Los Angeles native are New Orleans Saints defensive tackle **Akiem Hicks**, free agent **Will Svitek** and former Atlanta Falcons linebacker-turned-NFL executive **Brian Banks**. This trip marks the second USO/NFL tour for Mack, who traveled to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan in March of 2012, and the first USO experience for Hicks, Svitek and Banks.

DETAILS:

- During the eight-day USO/NFL tour, the group is scheduled to visit six military bases in three countries over the course of just eight days. Currently meeting with senior military leaders and visiting multiple work sites, the group is also dining with troops in the base DFAC and spending quality time visiting with troops throughout the week.
- In 1966, the NFL teamed up with the USO and became the first sports organization to send a group of players to Vietnam and other parts of Asia to demonstrate the league's support for America's troops. Continuing this time honored tradition, the NFL regularly teams up with the USO. Earlier this week, Indianapolis Colts head coach Chuck Pagano, quarterback Andrew Luck and tight end Dwayne Allen; as well as Pittsburgh Steelers guard David DeCastro returned from an eight-day USO tour led by Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr. The tour, which visited and entertained more than 9,500 troops stationed in six countries, marked Admiral Winnefeld's third and final USO tour as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- Last year, five active and former NFL players participated in three USO tours and created memorable moments for troops and military families in seven countries, to include the United Arab of Emirates, Afghanistan, Germany, Spain, Italy, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Among

the players who traveled overseas with the USO were Brandon Fields, Pierre Garçon and Jimmy Graham (March 2014); Troy Vincent (May 2014); and Brian Urlacher (December 2014).

- **HICKS** was the Saints third-round draft choice in 2012. In three seasons, he has developed into a mainstay along the New Orleans defensive line, appearing in 45 games with 30 starts and posting 162 tackles (91 solo), 6.5 sacks, three passes defended and one forced fumble. In 2014, Hicks played in 15 games with 14 starts at defensive end and posted 58 tackles (36 solo), two sacks and two passes defended.
- After being selected No. 21 overall by Cleveland in 2009, **MACK** started his first 85 games at center and played every offensive snap (5,279 plays) to begin his Browns career, with the streak ending after he fractured his fibula in the second quarter against Pittsburgh last season. He has been selected for two Pro Bowls (2010, 2013) and was selected to the All-Pro second team by the Associated Press in 2013.
- **SVITEK** has enjoyed a successful 10-year pro career as an offensive tackle despite having never played the position prior to joining the NFL. He has played for the Chiefs, Falcons, Patriots and Titans, and is now the longest tenured Stanford player in the NFL. Throughout his career he has remained committed to outreach with the military, helping raise money for wounded warriors, donating pro game tickets to military personnel and visiting with troops. This past month, Svitek traveled to Turkey with several other NFL players and led local youth football clinics.
- **BANKS** played for the Atlanta Falcons and with the United Football League. In addition to working in the NFL Officiating Department, Banks is a popular public speaker.
- The USO's "Every Moment Counts" campaign invites Americans to join Hicks, Mack, Svitek, Banks and the NFL in honoring, saluting and creating moments for our nation's troops and their families this year. This trip, much like the campaign centers around the countless every day moments – from family dinners and date nights to children's births and bedtime stories – that our troops and their families selflessly sacrifice due to their commitment and service to our country. To learn more visit USOMoments.org or join the conversation on Facebook or Twitter using #USOMoments.

QUOTES:

Attributed to Akiem Hicks:

"This is an awesome and life-changing opportunity for me to be able to go overseas and visit and spend time with our troops. As the son of a 22-year military veteran myself, I'm excited to have the opportunity to spend time with these men and women who make these sacrifices for all of us back here in the United States."

Attributed to Alex Mack:

"Last time I was on a USO tour, the troops showed me an extraordinary time. They were kind, friendly, engaging, and took me into their lives with open arms. I did amazing things with even more amazing people. Hearing their stories and learning about their life abroad gives me a new appreciation for what they do and go through. I look forward to another unforgettable trip."

Attributed to Will Svitek:

"It's a tremendous privilege to meet the men and women who defend our country. I was born in the communist country of Czechoslovakia, and my family emigrated here in 1984 when I was two years old

to achieve the American Dream. My parents taught me the value of freedom and the opportunity we have in America, and this is all possible for the sacrifice of the military. My family has thus become very patriotic and grateful for the military's service. I'm proud to be an American and I make sure to say 'thank you' to military personal whenever I get the opportunity. I am excited to be part of the USO tour."

Attributed to Brian Backs:

"It is a true honor and privilege to be part of this year's USO tour. It is an opportunity of a lifetime, and I can't wait to thank our soldiers."

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About the USO

The USO lifts the spirits of America's troops and their families millions of times each year at hundreds of places worldwide. We provide a touch of home through centers at airports and military bases in the U.S. and abroad, top quality entertainment and innovative programs and services. We also provide critical support to those who need us most, including forward-deployed troops, military families, wounded warriors, troops in transition and families of the fallen. The USO is a private, non-profit organization, not a government agency. Our programs and services are made possible by the American people, support of our corporate partners and the dedication of our volunteers and staff.

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