Please note: This is a transcription so there may be slight grammatical errors.

Mike Pereira:

Battlefields to Ballfields is simply a foundation that gives scholarships to veterans to become sports officials in their community, to allow them to integrate back into their community. A lot of them come back, they're unsure what they're going to do, they're unsure what they're going to face, and this is something that gets them involved again.

We issued our first scholarship in 2017, so we're six years on the road and we've been successful, we know we have just in the stories that we get from the people who we've given scholarships to. I think about the applications that roll in from veterans who are looking for something, far more than I ever anticipated. It is every day.

I remember when I went to Ramstein where the critically injured were their first stop back, and I visited with severely injured soldiers in Ramstein, and I was amazed talking to them how they all basically said the same thing. They wanted to be back with their brothers.

To me, the issues with veterans are it's all being a part of a team again, which is what officiating is. It is a fraternity. And so to go to the meetings and to go on a football field and be one of six people who have equal responsibility, you build these relationships that you know you're unique. You have the courage to put your butts on the line to do this when these people don't.

The language vet to vet is nothing that I could ever duplicate as a civilian, but official to official, the language is the same, the caring is the same, and you make a bad call, who's the first one that comes to your side? Your fellow officials and so it's that feeling that you get that builds within you, that creates the friendships and the strength and allows you to do what you do when you're putting your butts on the line like this.

Right now we have about 450 that are active with us. We're hoping for 1,000 in another year and a half but then we're looking to say, "Okay, what else could we could do? What could we do before they even get to the point where they show up in their communities and they're lost?"

So we've gone to the basis and gone to the transition departments and we've opened up the door to active service members so they can start before they get out officiating, wherever they are on base so that when they get home, wherever they are, they've got, wherever they might be, they're going to have a couple of years experience.

My goal is I want to go to a game. I don't care whether it's football or basketball or baseball, and I want to have to pay to buy a ticket and have one of my guys actually officiating so they advance through all the lower levels and got up to the college level to where it costs money to go in and see them work. And that's my goal.

And I kind of feel like that when that happens, there's going to be in me that swelling of my heart that says, "Wow, we started from scratch and now we have a person that's working college baseball or is in the NFL." That to me is the day that I look so forward to and I am going to make sure that it happens.

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