

THE ENQUIRER

Kentucky soldiers in Iraq to receive early present

UK-U of L game to be shown at certain camps

Enquirer staff reports

FRANKFORT - Governor Ernie Fletcher announced an early Christmas gift for Kentucky soldiers stationed in Iraq, their families back home, and University of Kentucky and University of Louisville basketball fans everywhere.

Call it "Freedom Calls from Freedom Hall."

On Saturday, the national ESPN feed of the UK-Louisville basketball game will be piped into the U.S. government's video system in Iraq, and, in turn, the videoconference signal from Camps Fallujah and Cooke in Iraq will be transmitted into Freedom Hall's audio-visual system.

This will allow fans watching the game to see and hear the soldiers on the big-screen TVs in Freedom Hall, and the troops in Iraq will be able to see and hear coaches, players and dignitaries express their love, support and appreciation.

Gov. Fletcher said the "Freedom Calls" will be an example of the new state motto, "Unbridled Spirit," at its most passionate.

"The Freedom Calls are a small way for us to honor and thank the troops for their bravery," Fletcher said. "We are thrilled to provide this special communications bond for the soldiers, their families, the people of Kentucky, and basketball fans everywhere.

"On that day, the color of the biggest winner won't be red or blue, but U.S. Army khaki, the color of the strongest team in the world."

Kentucky coach Tubby Smith said the "Freedom Calls" will add another special dimension to a game that captivates the Commonwealth every year.

"Kentucky and Louisville compete hard every time we play," said Smith, "but this time the 'Freedom Calls' will force everyone - coaches, players, and fans - to put the game into perspective. It is only a game, not a matter of life and death.

"Many of the soldiers in Iraq are the same ages as our players."

The plan is to select 18 Kentucky soldiers from the Fallujah and Cooke military bases in Iraq, and then invite the families of those soldiers to come to Freedom Hall for the game.

From one hour before the game until one hour after the game, two private video conference rooms will be available for the families and soldiers to have some personal time together.

During the pregame, commercial breaks, halftime and postgame, the audio and video feeds from the soldiers will be piped into Freedom Hall.

"It's an awesome chance for our soldiers to be able to communicate with their families around this big rivalry game," Louisville coach Rick Pitino said. "... I'm glad Kentucky soldiers will have this wonderful opportunity through 'Freedom Calls,' particularly during the holiday season."