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## ***Florida's Neiron Ball Nominated for Discover Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award***

**DALLAS (FWAA)** – Florida's Neiron Ball is the weekly nominee for the 2012 Discover Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award, to be announced at the end of the season. Ball, a redshirt sophomore linebacker from Jackson, Ga., has returned to football after brain surgery to repair a rare condition.

In 2011, Ball was diagnosed with a rare condition known as Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM), a condition in which blood vessels in the brain become tangled and eventually rupture. Though it affects just 300,000 Americans, it is often fatal.

Ball played as a freshman in 2010, mostly on special teams. During a spring practice session in February 2011, he experienced pressure in his neck followed by severe head pain. It felt, he told the Gainesville Sun, like "someone was squeezing my brain" – and something was. One of the tangled blood vessels had ruptured and was bleeding. A few weeks later, Ball underwent noninvasive brain surgery; neurosurgeons used radiation therapy to clot the blood vessel.

Ball missed the 2011 season while undergoing repeated MRIs to ensure no recurrence of the condition. There was doubt as to whether he would be able to return to football – he lost 30 pounds, and the road back was long – but he was cleared to play last June.

"I always knew it was going to happen," Ball told Gatorzone.com. "I knew that I was going to be able to play again. It was frustrating at some points. It makes me want to take advantage of this second opportunity that I got."

"When you have an injury to the neck or the head, you don't even want to think about football," Florida coach Will Muschamp told the Gainesville Sun. "You think about life and living and 40 years down the line of where you're going to be and what you're going to be doing.

"What a wonderful young man, handled it very maturely, has been through a tough road. ... To have a guy that is happy as he is to be able to play football again, he's a great example for our guys."

For the seventh straight year, the Football Writers Association of America and the Discover Orange Bowl will announce a weekly nominee each Wednesday during the season. A blue-ribbon panel will determine the winner from all of the nominees. The winner of the Discover Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award will be announced in December and be presented with the trophy during the week of the 2013 Discover BCS National Championship Game.

**The Courage Award** was created by ESPN The Magazine's senior writer Gene Wojciechowski, also an FWAA member. A select group of writers from the FWAA vote on the winner each year. The requirements for nomination include displaying courage on or off the field, including overcoming an injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through hardship.

Previous winners of the FWAA's Courage Award are Michigan State offensive lineman Arthur Ray Jr. (2011), Rutgers defensive tackle Eric LeGrand (2010), the University of Connecticut football team (2009), Tulsa's Wilson Holloway (2008), Navy's Zerbin Singleton (2007), Clemson's Ray Ray McElrathbey (2006), the Tulane football team (2005), Memphis' Haracio Colen (2004), San Jose State's Neil Parry (2003) and Toledo's William Bratton (2002).

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### **About the Orange Bowl**

The Orange Bowl is a 348-member, primarily-volunteer non-profit sports organization that promotes and serves the South Florida community. The Orange Bowl Festival features a year-round schedule of events culminating with the Discover Orange Bowl on January 1, 2013 and the Discover BCS National Championship on January 7, 2013. Other Orange Bowl core events include the MetroPCS Orange Bowl Basketball Classic, Orange Bowl Youth Football Alliance presented by Sports Authority, Orange Bowl International Tennis Championships, Orange Bowl Sailing Regatta Series and Orange Bowl Paddle Championships. For more information on the 2012-13 Orange Bowl Festival and its events, including promotional and volunteer opportunities through the Ambassador Program, log on to [www.orangebowl.org](http://www.orangebowl.org).

The **Football Writers Association of America**, a non-profit organization founded in 1941, consists of more than 1,200 men and women who cover college football for a living. The membership includes journalists, broadcasters and publicists, as well as key executives in all the areas that involve the game. The FWAA works to govern areas that include gameday operations, major awards and its annual All-America team. For more information about the FWAA and its award programs, contact Steve Richardson at [tiger@fwa.com](mailto:tiger@fwa.com) or 972-713-6198.

### **2012 Discover Orange Bowl Courage Award Nominees**

- **Sept. 26: Daniel Rodriguez, Clemson**
- **Oct. 3: Angelo Richardson, Arizona State**
- **Oct. 10: Patience Beard, Arkansas**
- **Oct. 17: Neiron Ball, Florida**