

ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD



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Bret Robertson 2015 Armed Forces Merit Award Recipient

FORT WORTH, TEX. -- U. S. Army veteran Bret Robertson, a junior strong safety at Westminster College in Fulton, Mo., is the fourth recipient of [Armed Forces Merit Award](#) presented by the [Football Writers Association of America \(FWAA\)](#). Coordinated by the staff at the [Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl](#), the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the FWAA was created in June 2012 "to honor an individual and/or a group within the realm of the sport of football."

Brant Ringler, the Executive Director of the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl, and Lee Barfknecht of the Omaha World-Herald, the FWAA's President, announced here Wednesday the 25-year old Robertson as the 2015 recipient during an 11 a.m. (CT) teleconference.

A seven-person committee made up of FWAA members and Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl officials selected Robertson, who joins other Army veterans Nate Boyer (Texas, 2012), Brandon McCoy (North Texas, 2013) and Daniel Rodriguez (Clemson, 2014) as Armed Forces Merit Award recipients.



After graduating from California (Mo.) High School in 2008, Robertson enlisted in the U. S. Army where he served more than three years. He was deployed to Iraq for one year and received the Army Commendation Medal along with his Purple Heart for his service. "My grandpa, my brother, and my stepdad all served," Robertson said. "It's a family thing. I wanted to serve my country."

Robertson also received the Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Star. He was also honored with the Non Commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon and a Combat Infantryman Badge.

"On this very special day, Veterans' Day 2015, we are pleased to join with the Football Writers Association of America to honor Bret Robertson as the fourth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award," said Ringler. "We had list of 18 outstanding nominations for this year's award and it is difficult to honor only one each year when we have individuals and programs that are very deserving of the honor."

Barfknecht echoed Ringler's sentiments along with adding that the FWAA is "pleased to team with Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl to recognize Robertson's achievement as a veteran that used his armed forces experiences to benefit his teammates and coaches at Westminster College. The FWAA also salutes the other 2015 nominations for their contributions on-and-off the field of play."



A three-season starter for Westminster, Robertson is serving his second season as the captain on a team that has won five of eight games in 2015. After missing his freshman season due to injuries, Robertson has compiled 202 total tackles during his 27-game Blue Jay career with 125 solo stops. He has also intercepted six passes (78 return yards) during his career with three forced fumbles, four fumble recoveries, 7.5 tackles for losses and four pass breakups in two-plus seasons.

With two games remaining on the 2015 Westminster football schedule, Robertson is 23 tackles away from breaking the school record for total tackles in a season. He ranks fourth in his conference in tackles per game (9.5) as he leads the Blue Jays in total tackles (76) with 46 solo stops. Robertson also has six tackles for losses (24 yards), three pass interceptions (20 return yards), two pass deflections and a fumble recovery.

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Robertson was named to the 2014 Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) All-Conference Second Team. He is a member of the Westminster track team where he holds the javelin record with a 54.44-meter (178.6-foot) last March after winning the 2014 St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SLIAC) Championship.

"I am very grateful to have the opportunity to be at Westminster and compete in both football and track," said Robertson. "Being on the football team is like being in the Army. You have guys looking after one another and have a brotherhood that lasts a long time."

In supporting Robertson's nomination for the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the FWAA, out-going Westminster College President George B. Forsythe stated that "Bret has brought his self-discipline, commitment to service, and exemplary integrity to our campus where he is a leader in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in the community."



Dr. Forsythe, who retired from the school this past summer, also added that he had "gotten to know Bret most closely through the College's Military Veterans Club. As a retired Army officer with 35 years of active duty service, I meet each semester with our military veterans at the College to discuss campus life and exchange ideas on how to enhance our community. Bret has been a leader in this group, and has participated with his fellow veterans in a wide range of service projects on campus and in the local community. In addition to being a full-time student and Division III athlete, Bret makes time to give back to his community through service. He is an inspiration to us all."

A Brigadier General in U. S. Army, Dr. Forsythe also said Robertson "is a curious, engaging, and serious student. This summer, he will travel to Rwanda and Tanzania as part of a team from our school to work on service projects in rural areas of those two countries."

Dr. Robert N. Hansen, the Director of Organizational Leadership Program at Westminster, stated that "in my 42 years of being a college professor, I've never had a student quite like Bret. He is a terrific young man who is just now realizing how much he has to offer and how he can change the world. Even though I knew Bret very well before this past summer, it wasn't until he became part of my East Africa Project Team for Humanity for Children (an international humanitarian organization focusing on the welfare of children and mothers) that I really became aware of all his strengths. Being together 24/7 for 25 days under tough conditions allowed me to see even deeper into his beliefs/values, motivations, and backstory."



Dr. Hanson added that "college professors love to see students stretch beyond what they think they can do. I've seen Bret do this time and again as he evolved from an "I'm not so smart" self-concept to an individual capable of high levels of critical thinking and creative problem-solving. His transformation over the past few years has been remarkable and we are so proud of the way he has grown into a fine student and leader. Bret's military experience, including being wounded in action, has propelled him to think deeply about how to help other veterans."

Speaking of the day when he was wounded in combat, Robertson said "it was just a normal day. We were doing security for a convoy delivering supplies when an EFP went off in front of our truck. Another went off right beside us that penetrated our truck, throwing shrapnel throughout and a piece hit me in the left side of my face. We were lucky that day. There were big chunks of shrapnel stuck in the armor of the truck a few inches from my face."

In concluding his comments on Robertson, Dr. Hanson said "for the past 18 months, Bret has been working on his plan to create a program for vets that includes fitness, service and support. He has interned with the YMCA, met with veterans to talk about their needs, conducted research on veterans' transition programs, and taken classes to develop his social entrepreneurial skills. I see this theme as a life-long commitment for Bret."

In a school news release last May, it was written that Robertson's "life is coming full circle in a way he never imagined it would, as he brings his Westminster College education together with his military experience in Iraq. At Westminster, Bret is taking something he is passionate about and learning how to forge that passion into a career, based on leadership that will improve the lives of others. A few years ago, however, he never dreamed he would be here. Growing up, Bret never planned on going to college. Schoolwork has never come easy for him. In middle school, Bret was diagnosed with learning differences; he had trouble with spelling and reading comprehension. In high school in the small town of California (near Jefferson City), he couldn't see himself going to college, but the military was a path he knew."

Now seven years after enlisting and four years removed from his Army experience, Robertson continues to serve both on-and-off the field of play. For that, Bret Robertson is the 2015 recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the FWAA.

[ESPN Events](#), a division of ESPN, owns and operates a large portfolio of collegiate sporting events worldwide. The roster includes three Labor Day weekend college football games; 13 college bowl games, 10 college basketball events and two college award shows, which accounts for approximately 250-plus hours of programming, reaches almost 64 million viewers and attracts over 700,000 attendees each year. With satellite offices in Boca Raton, Boise, Birmingham, Dallas-Fort Worth, Albuquerque, St. Petersburg and Las Vegas, ESPN Events builds relationships with conferences, schools and local communities, as well as providing unique experiences for teams and fans. ESPN Events also manages the Big 12 Corporate Partner Program. For more information, visit the official [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [YouTube](#) pages.



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Collegiate Basketball - [AdvoCare Invitational](#) (Walt Disney World Resort near Orlando, Fla.); [Armed Forces Classic](#) (Marine Corps Base Camp Smedley D. Butler, Okinawa, Japan); [DIRECTV Wooden Legacy](#) (Orange County, Calif.); *College Basketball Awards Presented by Wendy's* (Los Angeles); [Gildan Charleston Classic](#) (South Carolina); [Hawaiian Airlines Diamond Head Classic](#) (Honolulu); [Jimmy V Men's Classic Presented by Corona](#) (New York City); [Jimmy V Women's Classic Presented by Corona](#) (Hartford/Storrs, Conn.); [NIT Season Tip-Off](#) (Brooklyn, N.Y.); [Puerto Rico Tip-Off](#) (San Juan) and [State Farm Champions Classic](#) (Chicago).



The **Football Writers Association of America** (FWAA, www.sportswriters.net) consists of the men and women across North America who cover college football for a living. Founded in 1941, 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 game day operations, major awards and an All-America team. Through its website, the FWAA works to improve communication among all those who work within the game. The FWAA also sponsors scholarships for aspiring writers and an annual writing contest. Behind the leadership of President Lee Barfknecht of the Omaha World-Herald, Executive Director Steve Richardson and a board of veteran journalists, the FWAA continues to grow and work to help college football prosper at all levels. There are now over 1,300 members.

Media Contacts

Tim Simmons, Armed Forces Merit Award Coordinator at 720-244-6580 or bfishinc@aol.com
Steve Richardson, Football Writers Association of America at 214-870-6516 or tiger@fwaa.com
Bryan Delgado, Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl at 817-810-0266 or bryan.delgado@espn.com
Rachel Margolis Siegal, ESPN Media at 860-766-2798 or rachel.m.siegal@espn.com