

ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD



For release, 9 a.m. (CT), November 11, 2018

Rhodes 2016 Armed Forces Merit Award Recipient

FORT WORTH, TEX. - U. S. Marine veteran [Steven Rhodes](#), a senior defensive end at Middle Tennessee State University, is the fifth 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 Steve Richardson, the FWAA’s Executive Director, announced here Friday that Rhodes, who will be 28 in 11 days, as the 2016 recipient during an 9 a.m. (CT) teleconference.



A seven-person committee made up of FWAA members and Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl officials selected Rhodes from a list of 16 nominations for the 2016 award. [Nate Boyer](#) of the University of Texas was named the initial recipient of the award in 2012 followed by [Brandon McCoy](#) of the University of North Texas in 2013, [Daniel Rodriguez](#) from Clemson University in 2014 and [Bret Robertson](#) of Westminster College (Fulton, Mo.) in 2015. All four individuals were U. S. Army veterans before playing college football.

“On this very special day, Veterans’ Day 2016, we are pleased to join with the Football Writers Association of America to name Steven Rhodes as the fifth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award,” said Ringler. “We had a list of 16 outstanding nominations for this year’s award and it is difficult to select only one each year when we have individuals and programs that are very deserving of the honor.”

Richardson echoed Ringler’s sentiments along with adding that the FWAA is “pleased to team with Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl to recognize Rhodes’ achievement as a veteran who used his armed forces experiences to benefit his teammates and coaches at Middle Tennessee State University. The FWAA also salutes the other 2016 nominations for their contributions on-and-off the field of play.”

Rhodes joined the Middle Tennessee football program after serving five years in the U.S. Marines. Following his enrollment in 2013, the NCAA originally ruled that Rhodes only had two years of eligibility and would have to sit out the 2013 season since he played recreational football on base for a two-year period.

After Rhodes’ eligibility story went national on August 18, 2013, the next day the NCAA issued a statement saying Rhodes could play immediately and had four years of eligibility. Since the August 2013 ordeal, Rhodes has played in 47 games at Middle Tennessee with 27 career starts, including nine this fall for the 6-3 Blue Raiders.

A 6-foot-3, 260-pound defensive end and fourth oldest player in the Football Bowl Subdivision, Rhodes is the team’s eighth leading tackler with 29 total stops (18 unassisted) with 4.5 tackles for losses, 2.5 sacks, two pass deflections, five quarterback hurries, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. For his career, Rhodes has 98 total tackles (63 unassisted).



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Following graduation in 2007 from Antioch (Tenn.) High School where he played football, Rhodes enlisted in the United States Marine Corps as a shoulder injury and financial issues initially kept him from attending college. Rhodes' "road" back to college football started three years ago when he was stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station in New River, N.C. When he was moved to MCAS Miramar, Calif., he started for the Miramar Falcons in 2012.

Even though he only played one season, his Miramar coaches saw the potential he displayed and helped to make sure he reached his goal. A former Falcon coach helped Rhodes film his games so he could send them to colleges. With the film from the games, Rhodes was recruited by Middle Tennessee, the school he had planned on attending before sustaining his shoulder injury.

Rhodes credits the Marines for "his healthy perspective and mental toughness. What the [Marines] do and what they stand for - Honor, Courage, Commitment - it stands for every aspect of my life."

Motivated by his family, Rhodes states that his wife (Adrienne, formerly in the Navy but now a stay-at-home mom who home schools their children) and two sons (Kameron and Devon) inspire him to excel on the football field and in the classroom. Rhodes is pursuing a degree in Organized Communication. Rhodes met his wife while he was in the Marines and she was in the Navy.

"It's definitely tough," Rhodes said. "It's like having several fulltime jobs. I'm a husband first, then a father, then a student-athlete. My freshman year was the worst - just trying to make that adjustment. My wife and I have gotten on the same page. She's made it as seamless and worry-free for me as possible. We're moving toward a common goal. It was a tough ride, but I wouldn't change any of it. It's molded me into the man I am today."

Middle Tennessee coach Rick Stockstill said Rhodes had leadership qualities as soon as he joined the team, but that it took a while for him to have a big effect on the team because he was only around his new teammates at practice.

"Just because you're a leader in some other capacity, until you get to know people and people get to know you on a personal level, I think it takes a little bit of time," Stockstill said. "When he was a freshman, everybody on the outside assumed he was going to be a great leader and all of that, which he was. But it didn't impact the team because the team didn't know him. Now, he's established himself not only as a player but as a person, he's one of our leaders."

[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; FCS opening-weekend game; 13 college bowl games, 11 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 Albuquerque, Birmingham, Boca Raton, Boise, Dallas-Fort Worth, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Montgomery and St. Petersburg, 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. **Collegiate Football** - [AdvoCare Texas Kickoff](#) (Houston); [AdvoCare V100 Texas Bowl](#) (Houston); [Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl](#) (Atlanta); [Birmingham Bowl](#) (Alabama); [Boca Raton Bowl](#) (Florida); [Camping World Kickoff](#) (Orlando, Fla.); [Famous Idaho Potato Bowl](#) (Boise); [Gildan New Mexico Bowl](#) (Albuquerque); [Hawai'i Bowl](#) (Honolulu); [Las Vegas Bowl](#) (Nevada); [Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl](#) (Dallas-Fort Worth); [MEAC/SWAC Challenge](#) (Baton Rouge, La.); Montgomery Kickoff Classic (Montgomery, Ala.); [Popeyes Bahamas Bowl](#) (Nassau); [Raycom Media Camellia Bowl](#) (Montgomery, Ala.); [St. Petersburg Bowl](#) (Florida); [The Home Depot College Football Awards](#) (Atlanta) and [Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl](#) (Dallas-Fort Worth). **Collegiate Basketball** - [AdvoCare Invitational](#) (Walt Disney World Resort near Orlando, Fla.); *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](#) (Uncasville, Conn.); [NIT Season Tip-Off](#) (Brooklyn, N.Y.); [PK80](#) (Portland, Ore.); [State Farm Armed Forces Classic](#) (Honolulu); [State Farm Champions Classic](#) (New York City); [Tire Pros Invitational](#) (Orlando, Fla.) and [Wooden Legacy](#) (Orange County, Calif.). For more information, visit the official [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [YouTube](#) pages.

The **Football Writers Association of America** (FWAA, <http://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 Mark Anderson of the Las Vegas Review-Journal, Executive Director Steve Richardson and a board of veteran journalists, the FWAA continues grow and work to help college football prosper at all levels. There are now over 1,300 members.

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