

# ARMED FORCES



# MERIT AWARD

For release, 10 a.m. (CT), November 11, 2019

## Viti named 2019 Armed Forces Merit Award Recipient

FORT WORTH, TEX., November 11, 2019 - Army West Point coach and military veteran [Mike Viti](#) has been selected as the eighth 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, executive director of the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl, and Matt Fortuna, FWAA president, announced Monday during a teleconference that Viti was selected from a list of 38 nominations (33 individuals and five programs) as the 2019 recipient by a seven-person committee made up of FWAA members and Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl officials.



“Coach Viti has distinguished himself as a collegiate football player, an Army veteran and now as a coach,” said Ringler. “More importantly, Coach Viti has given of himself with his work with Legacies Alive in support of families of our nation’s fallen heroes.”

Fortuna added, “Coach Viti joins a list of remarkable individuals and programs that have been recipients of the Armed Forces Merit Award. He has been successful in each phase of his life as a player and coach at Army West Point, along with his service in the military and his support of Legacies Alive. With so many deserving individuals and programs, it is difficult to honor only one recipient annually.”

Viti, who is in his fourth season as an assistant coach with the Army West Point football, co-founded Legacies Alive (LA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The mission of the Legacies Alive is to strengthen and support the Gold Star families of our nation’s fallen heroes and brings national awareness to the life and character of all service members who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Viti oversees the strategic and executive direction of the organization.



“Legacies Alive has allowed me to passionately honor the sacrifice and service of my heroes,” said Viti. “The interactions I have had with their Gold Star Families are some of the most powerful and influential experiences I have had in my life. It has inspired me to continue to connect our mission with more Americans so that our country’s sons and daughters forever connect the freedoms and liberties they are afforded, with the sacrifice and service our fallen and their families.”



As a student-athlete at Army West Point (2004-2007), Viti earned four varsity letters and was a team captain. As a fullback used primarily as a blocker, he carried the ball 91 times during his career for 321 yards and three scores while catching 30 passes for 198 yards. Viti also served as a Regimental Commander during his senior year.

Following graduation from the U.S. Military Academy in 2008, Viti was stationed in Oklahoma and Colorado after being commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. He served with the 4th Infantry Division as well as the 214th Fires Brigade. He served in combat in Afghanistan where he was a platoon leader in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Viti has earned a bronze star and a combat action badge.

## Viti named 2019 Armed Forces Merit Award Recipient, page 2

After retiring from the military as a captain, Viti embarked on Mike's Hike For Heroes, a cross country trek where he walked one kilometer for every service member killed in action in the global war on terror. He concluded the walk covering 7,100 kilometers or 4,400 miles beginning in Washington and wrapping up at the Army-Navy Game presented by USAA in Baltimore, Md.

Robert Morris University president [Dr. Chris Howard](#) was named last November as the seventh recipient. A 1991 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, Dr. Howard was a Rhodes Scholar and received the 1990 Campbell Trophy, the highest academic award in the nation presented to a senior college football player. He currently serves on the selection committee for the College Football Playoff.

[Nate Boyer](#) of the University of Texas, Austin was the initial recipient in 2012. Other recipients were [Brandon McCoy](#) of the University of North Texas in 2013, [Daniel Rodriguez](#) from Clemson University in 2014, [Bret Robertson](#) of Westminster College (Fulton, Mo.) in 2015 and [Steven Rhodes](#) from Middle Tennessee State University in 2016.

[Kansas State](#) and its football team were honored in November 2017 as the sixth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award for the university's partnership with the United States Army that created a bond between the school's athletic department and the Iron Rangers at Fort Riley.

[ESPN Events](#), a division of ESPN, owns and operates a large portfolio of 35 collegiate sporting events worldwide. The roster includes three Labor Day weekend college football games, the FCS opening-weekend game, 16 college bowl games, 11 college basketball events, a college softball event, an esports event and two college award shows, which accounts for approximately 375-plus hours of live programming, reaches almost 64 million viewers and attracts over 800,000 attendees each year. With satellite offices in Albuquerque, Birmingham, Boca Raton, Boise, Dallas-Fort Worth, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Montgomery and Tampa, ESPN Events builds relationships with conferences, schools and local communities, as well as providing unique experiences for teams and fans. 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 Matt Fortuna of The Athletic, 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 1,400 members.

### Media Contacts

- Tim **Simmons**, Armed Forces Merit Award Coordinator, 720/244-6580, [bfishinc@aol.com](mailto:bfishinc@aol.com)
- Steve **Richardson**, Football Writers Association of America, 214/870-6516, [tiger@fwaa.com](mailto:tiger@fwaa.com)
- Greg **Kincaid**, Assistant AD/Communications Football, Army West Point, 786/972-1299, [gregkincaid14@gmail.com](mailto:gregkincaid14@gmail.com)
- Drew **Harris**, Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl, 254/716-8573, [drew@firstpitchpr.com](mailto:drew@firstpitchpr.com)



# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

---

**TIM SIMMONS:** My name is Tim Simmons. I'm the coordinator of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers Association of America. And we're here today to announce the eighth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award.

The award was initiated in June of 2012 with the help of Steve "Tiger" Richardson of the Football Writers along with Brant Ringler, who is the executive director of the Armed Forces Bowl.

We had 38 nominations this year for the award, 33 individuals and five programs. We whittled it down to the final five. And out of that five, the selection committee, made up of five members of the Football Writers Association along with two members of the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl staff, selected the winner, the 2019 recipient.

We will have a transcript about 30 to 45 minutes after the teleconference that we will email out and again that's handled by Caption Pros doing that.

So again, to make the announcement of the 2019 recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers is Brant Ringler, the executive director of the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl. Brant.

**BRANT RINGLER:** Thank you, Tim. Thank you everybody for being on the call today. First and foremost, you know, on this Veterans Day and every day we must always recognize, remember, and support all those who serve and their families. The nation's defenders protect our freedoms and keep our country safe. So thank you for what everybody has done to protect our country.

This award is based on Armed Forces members that come back to college football and not only support our great sport but also continue to serve others in the military space. Coach Viti has done exactly that, from his Mike's Hike for Heroes to founding a 501(c)(3) called Legacies Alive, whose mission is to support Gold Star Families, which is simply outstanding.

On behalf of the Armed Forces Merit Award and the FWAA we are proud to present the 2019 Armed Forces Merit Award to Coach Mike Viti.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Brant, thank you very much and now the president of the Football Writers, Matt Fortuna, with The Athletic. Matt, are you here?



# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

---

**MATT FORTUNA:** I'm here. I'd just like to piggyback off of Brant's comments. This is an award where there are just so many deserving individuals and programs. The nominees are very hard to sort through year after year. Coach Viti's work on and off the field has just really distinguished him amongst everyone else this year, and we couldn't be more proud to present him with this honor today on Veterans Day.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Matt, thank you very much.

We're honored today to have the coach of Army West Point with us, Coach [Jeff] Monken. Coach, just some comments about Matt and his work there as a football coach. I guess he's in his first season overall on the Army West Point staff.

**COACH MONKEN:** Mike is just tremendous. He's a tremendous asset to our program as a coach. But to have a guy like him who played here, was a team captain, so well respected here at West Point and not only for what he did here but what he also did as a soldier in the Army. And he's just a tremendous leader, very humble.

And as I listen to you guys talk about Mike and the things that he does beyond the field with his 501(c)3 and how he supports Gold Star Families is just incredible. And he does that very quietly, doesn't beat his own drum or try to spread attention about what he's doing. He really is very, very much in the background and tries to push those families and those soldiers and what they do to the forefront. And it really is a great example of servant leadership.

He's just tremendous for our young men who are going to follow in his footsteps and go serve in the Army. And, hopefully, they will serve just like he does, putting others first.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Coach, thank you very much. Before I introduce Coach Mike, I'd like to thank Greg Kincaid and Matt Faulkner from Army West Point for their work in nominating Mike for the award, the Sports Information office there at Army.

And now, Coach Viti, congratulations on being the eighth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers. You're the first coach to win the honor and the second Academy graduate to earn the honor. Chris Howard, an Air Force Academy graduate and veteran, won the award last year.



# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

---

So congratulations and just your opening thoughts about being the recipient this season.

**COACH VITI:** It's a great honor, and I accept this award with tremendous grace and humility from the Armed Forces Bowl and the Football Writers Association of America. You look at it on a day like today, Veterans Day, from the 101st anniversary of finishing World War I, The Great War, and look at the nominees and the men and women and my brothers in arms and sisters in arms who have given an awful lot to this country. And to just be recognized for this award is just -- makes me, you know, have a great sense of responsibility to go do more and continue to be an inspiration for other people but then to continue my service through the families that I feel are impacted as much as anyone through military service and gave that ultimate sacrifice.

So thank you very much. I am very humbled and honored to represent Army West Point football, United States Military Academy, Coach [Jeff] Monken, and under his leadership to be able to have -- have some time to do things outside of the realm of football that continues with our mission is just a great honor. Thank you.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Coach, Coach Mike, just thinking about it, when you were there, I don't think the fullback was so much of the offense at Army when you were playing. But last three seasons looks like you've had combined 1,000-yard rushers at that position. How different is the game today as compared to when you played?

**COACH VITI:** Well, I just look at, you know, the system we have, games we have here allow, you know, those guys to be set up for great success and, you know, they'll -- they're a product of their hard work and their commitment to the program and the culture that they're able to thrive in here. And the difference between then and now is it's so much about what's going on into the future for these guys. And they're given all the tools and the way to be successful, and I think that's a tremendous -- those statistics are more about a product of the guys around them, the offensive line, and just the scheme they're a part of. But whether it's yards or frame about the football, they're the same guys.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Coach, can you tell us how did playing football impact not only your military service but what you've done charity-wise with Mike's Hike and then the Legacies Alive? How does that all combine together?

# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD



Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

**COACH VITI:** Football is the absolute foundation for my leadership. To me, it's the greatest leadership vehicle and laboratory for developing leaders and it really gives a tremendous foundation to develop the tenets of leadership, that you're going to have to put that into practice week in and week out, year in, year out. And that, to me, was how I based my leadership as an Army officer.

And then I think transitioning into your service, you go back to those core values that you grew and developed as a player and as a leader on a football field. You knew that those experiences would pay dividends to the men and women that you served in uniform. And the greatest quality a leader can have is to try to inspire those around them to be the absolute best, and I try to carry that with me through my military service and put people first and be the best I can be for them.

And I think your military service impacts everybody in different ways, in unique ways. And I always looked at my military service as not just -- there was never going to be a period on the end of that. It was going to be -- I had experiences in the Army that I knew would be lessons into the future.

And having served in Afghanistan as a combat leader, the thing that really struck home with me was when you came home, you saw the impact it had on those families. And the ones that really were evident to me were our nation's Gold Star Families, and they're forever sacrificing for the freedoms and liberties that we have as civilians now.

So I felt a drive and just a yearning to serve those families and to give back. And now as a coach and after forming Legacies Alive and the events that we do, we try to instill those values in your players and give them tools that they can be successful in military careers and on future fields in different arenas.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Any questions for Coach Mike or if Coach Monken is still on the line or Brant or Matt from Football Writers? Any questions?

**Q. Congratulations to Coach Mike Viti. I'd just like to ask Mike about the legacy of his 2014 Walk across the Country. I think it was 4,000 kilometers, one for every soldier that was killed in service in the conflict. What do you feel about the legacy of the effort you made in that walk?**

**COACH VITI:** You know, the goal of the Hike was to walk through the hometowns and meet the families of our nation's fallen heroes and just let them know the grateful servicemen who came back,



# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

---

that we would forever do whatever we can to help heal them. And, you know, the Hike was exactly that. It was a vehicle to raise national awareness to the American public who don't really know what a Gold Star Family is and who they are. So the Hike was designed to connect with as many Gold Star Families as possible.

During the Hike, we connected with 67 Gold Star Families, and through that process meet -- I knew that this was going to be a lifelong calling. And we met those families and finished the Hike at Army-Navy and continue to serve them, continue to bring them to the Army-Navy game, sporting events, and different social events and connect with other nonprofits that are able to help out.

So the legacy for me is that that Hike was a start and not a destination, and we continue to still have that same mission and same drive and hopefully raise awareness in a very respectful way, in a way that is always putting those families first but in a really graceful way.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Any other questions for Coach Mike or any other participants in the teleconference? If not, thank you for everybody's participation today. Go ahead.

**Q. I just thought I'd ask Mike: Mike, you talk often about one of your teammates that was lost in the U.S. Army service, Chase Prasnicki. I know his family you've been very close to you through the Gold Star program. Maybe if you could just talk about your teammate Chase Prasnicki.**

**COACH VITI:** He's just the embodiment of a servant, selfless man, leader, son, husband, brother. And he's an inspiration for guys still in our program to this day. We keep his legacy alive just by honoring the way we carry out our day-to-day business and understand the reality of the profession we're in and that, if called upon, we'll do anything we need to.

And Chase volunteered to be on that mission one of his first days in theater, and selflessly gave his life to our country. And it's just that -- those characteristics and that type of person, because Chase Prasnicki was that exact person as an Army football player, did anything and everything he could to help his team.



# ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Presented by the Football Writers Association of America  
**Media Conference**  
November 11, 2019

---

He did those same exact same things in the Army, serving the men and women he served And just somebody who you always have a thought with. And Veterans Day is here for those who are to enjoy it, but you certainly think of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice a little bit more on days like Veterans Day.

**Q. Thank you.**

**TIM SIMMONS:** Okay. Any comments for Brant or for Matt Fortuna with the Football Writers?

**BRANT RINGLER:** I just want to say thank you, again, Coach, for all the great work you continue to do off the field. It means so much to so many people, and you should be very proud of that. And keep going strong there at Army and have a great end of the season.

**COACH VITI:** Thanks, Brant.

**MATT FORTUNA:** I just want to thank Coach for his service and thank everyone here for allowing people like myself to be a part of this award as well. It's very rewarding, and it's a special day to be a part of.

**TIM SIMMONS:** Again, thank you very much. Again, thanks to the Army West Point Sports Information staff, Greg [Kincaid] and Matt [Faulkner]. Again, the plan is to present the award officially at the Army football banquet. Brant Ringler will be there. So that's the tentative plan. Again, thanks, everybody.

And again, Coach Viti, congratulations on being the eighth recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers. Thank you very much.