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Daniel Rodriguez named 2014 Armed Forces Merit Award Winner

FORT WORTH, TX, November 11, 2014 - Daniel Rodriguez, a senior wide receiver and special teams player at Clemson University, is the third 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 with a military background and/or involvement that has an impact within the realm of college football."

The 26-year old Rodriguez will be "officially" announced as the 2014 recipient via a teleconference today at an 11 a.m. (CT) by Brant Ringler, the Executive Director of the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl, and Kirk Bohls, the FWAA's President.

Selected by a seven-person committee made up of representatives from the FWAA and the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl, Rodriguez joins Nate Boyer of the University of Texas and Brandon McCoy of the University of North Texas as recipients of the Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the FWAA.



Boyer, who is completing his third-season as the long snapper for the Longhorns, was honored in 2012 while McCoy was the 2013 recipient during his fourth and final season as a defensive lineman for the Mean Green. Rodriguez was an Armed Forces Merit Award semi-finalist both years while playing at Clemson where he was the 2012 recipient as the Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage and USAA Athletic Inspiration Awards while being an ESPY finalist for the Jim Valvano Perseverance Award.

Attending college on the GI Bill, Rodriguez was offered a spot on the 2012 Clemson team as a walk-on after coach Dabo Swinney saw a video about the former U.S. Army Sergeant and recipient of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal with Valor Device for his heroism at Kamdesh.

"On this very special day, Veterans' Day 2014, we are pleased to join with the Football Writers Association of America to honor Daniel Rodriguez from Clemson University as the third recipient of the Armed Forces Merit Award," said Ringler. "We had list of outstanding nominations for this year's award and it is difficult to honor only one each year when we have men and programs that are very deserving of the honor."

Bohls, a columnist for the Austin American-Statesman, echoed Ringler's sentiments along with adding that the FWAA is "pleased to team with Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl to recognize Rodriguez' achievement as a veteran that used his armed forces experiences to benefit his teammates and coaches at Clemson University. The FWAA also salutes the other 2014 nominations for their contributions on-and-off the field of play."



Since starting his Clemson career in 2012, Rodriguez has played in 35-straight games for the Tigers as the school has recorded a 29-6 record with bowl wins over LSU (Peach) and Ohio State (Orange). He has caught 10 passes during his career with one touchdown in a 2013 Tiger win over The Citadel on Military Appreciation Day. Rodriguez will graduate next month from Clemson with a degree in parks, recreation and tourism management.

While serving in the Army (2006-2010), Rodriguez spent approximately 18 months in Iraq and one year in Afghanistan. He was involved in Battle of Kamdesh in Afghanistan (October 3, 2009) when 300 Taliban insurgents battled with 38 U.S. troops (eight Americans lost their lives and 22 were injured, including Rodriguez).

Rodriguez' story has been detailed in a book "Rise: An Epic Story of a Soldier, His Dream, and a Promise Kept," which he co-wrote with New York Times best-selling author Joe Layden. Sony's TriStar Productions has also secured the rights to make a movie based on the book that was released in October 2014.

In Esquire's 80th anniversary issue in October 2013, Brian Mockenhaupt wrote that "Rodriguez had been a star high school football player, and after the months of post-Afghanistan, screw-the-world, no-one-knows-what-I've-been-through darkness, he rekindled his dream to play college ball, worked out three times a day, and made a stylish video showcasing his manic drive that blew up on YouTube and drew coaches' attention."

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Mockenhaupt quoted Rodriguez in saying that he devoted himself "to something rather than sulk in my reclusiveness, that's what helps get me through it. The more I put time into something I was passionate about, the more I strayed away from my nightmares and waking up in panics and sweats. I still have my moments, but I found balance. So many veterans come home and just revolve their lives around the negativity. Everybody's gone through adversity. Just because you enlisted doesn't make you special."

The Esquire writer noted that he found a "profound value in his (Rodriguez) story. He does not view himself as a war veteran or a college athlete; rather he defines himself by everything in between then and now - the darkness, the coming to terms, the decision to transform, and the lonely, relentless work. The first element, the darkness, is a given for many. The rest is a choice."

Swinney feels Rodriguez "presence has helped the team, and he never forces his leadership. It has really made the team appreciate our military, and realize that there are a lot more problems in the world than our third-down conversion rate."

Sammy Watkins, Clemson's all-time receiving leader and the fourth overall pick in the 2014 National Football League draft, spoke highly of Rodriguez when the two were Tiger playing together during the 2012 and 2013 seasons. "I loved having him on our team," said Watkins about Rodriguez. "He's a motivator, and he brings fire to our team. Daniel's hyped up every day, hyped up just to be living. We know what he's been through. I like the way he comes in every day and goes to work, just like everybody else. He practices hard, he plays hard."

Tajh Boyd, the Tigers' all-time leader for passing yards and touchdowns before becoming a sixth-round pick in the 2014 NFL Draft, said that "when you come to Clemson you learn about the military heritage and history, but when you've got a guy like Daniel on your team, it changes your whole perspective. It's exciting to have him on our team - a guy of a similar age and to hear about everything that went on. That's real life."

[ESPN Events](#), a subsidiary of ESPN, owns and operates a large portfolio of collegiate sporting events worldwide. The roster includes two Labor Day weekend college football games; 11 college bowl games and eight college basketball events, which accounts for approximately 200 hours of programming, reaches almost 64 million viewers and attracts over a half a million 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. **Collegiate Football** - [AdvoCare V100 Texas Bowl](#) (Houston); [AdvoCare Texas Kickoff](#) (Houston); [Birmingham Bowl](#) (Alabama); [Bitcoin St. Petersburg Bowl](#) (Florida); [Boca Raton Bowl](#) (Florida); [Famous Idaho Potato Bowl](#) (Boise); [Gildan New Mexico Bowl](#) (Albuquerque); [Hawai'i Bowl](#) (Honolulu); [Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl](#) (Dallas-Fort Worth); [Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl](#) (Dallas-Fort Worth); [MEAC/SWAC Challenge presented by Disney](#) (Orlando, Fla.); [Raycom Media Camellia Bowl](#) (Montgomery, Ala.); [Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl](#) (Nevada) and [The Home Depot College Football Awards](#) (Orlando, Fla.). **Collegiate Basketball** - [Armed Forces Classic](#) (U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen, PR); [DIRECTV Wooden Legacy](#) (Orange County, Calif.); [Gildan Charleston Classic](#) (South Carolina); [Hawaiian Airlines Diamond Head Classic](#) (Honolulu); [Jimmy V Men's & Women's Basketball Classics Presented by Corona](#) (New York City & Notre Dame, Ind.); [Orlando Classic](#) (Walt Disney World Resort near Orlando, Fla.); [Puerto Rico Tip-Off](#) (San Juan, PR) and [State Farm Champions Classic](#) (Indianapolis). For more information, visit www.espsnevents.com or follow on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



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 Kirk Bohls of the Austin American-Statesman, 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 1,200 members.



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