

# Tulane University's Devon Walker to Accept 2013 Disney Spirit Award

## **Former Green Wave starting safety and team captain continues to inspire from the sidelines following life-altering injury**

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (Nov. 22, 2013) — Tulane University senior Devon Walker will receive this year's Disney Spirit Award, an honor given annually by Disney Sports to college football's most inspirational figure. Walker has exhibited tremendous courage and perseverance following a severe spinal cord injury last season, and has become a motivational figure for the football team, the university and the New Orleans community.

"Winning the Disney Spirit Award gives me a renewed sense of purpose to continue on my path toward recovery and, in doing so, provide inspiration to others to never give up," said Walker, 22, who is paralyzed from the neck down. "I have a fantastic support system in my family, friends, teammates, coaches, university staff, and others from around the country who constantly encourage me to keep fighting. Returning to campus and my team this fall has allowed me to regain a sense of normalcy and has given me hope for a full and successful life."

Walker began his football career with Tulane in 2009 as a walk-on before earning a scholarship and becoming the starting safety and team captain for the 2012 season. In the second game of that season against Tulsa, Walker collided with a teammate while attempting to make a tackle just seconds before halftime. The impact was heard throughout the stadium, as was the silence that followed. Walker injured his C3 and C4 vertebrae, which left him paralyzed from the neck down. He spent several months in the hospital before returning home in December 2012.

A year later, he returned to the classroom and to the football field sidelines as an ever-present supporter of his teammates, a testament to his determination and resilience. He re-enrolled in classes this fall and is close to earning his bachelor's degree in cell and molecular biology.

"Devon's positive outlook and determination to remain an integral figure within the Tulane football program embodies the true essence of the Disney Spirit Award," said Faron Kelley, director of sports marketing for Disney Sports. "We salute his courage, resilience and perseverance, and wish him every success in life."

In between his schoolwork, Walker continues to attend rehabilitation sessions three days a week and spends ample time with the team, attending meetings, practices and all Tulane home football games.

Although he is no longer on the active roster, Walker remains a focal point for the team this season. A sticker with Walker's jersey No. 18 is on every helmet, and no active player wears his No. 18 jersey. Before each game, a Tulane player, who is specifically chosen for his teamwork and dedication, is designated to run onto the field waving a No. 18 flag before the rest of the players take the field. And Walker gives a pregame speech to the team each week. The Tulane Green Wave is currently 6-4 this year with two games remaining.

The New Orleans and Tulane University communities have rallied around Walker, with many groups donating time and money to help create Devon's Den, an apartment attached to the Walker family home specially designed for him. The apartment is outfitted with the latest technology and medical enhancements that make living at home easier and

more accessible for Walker and his family.

"Devon Walker is a special young man and is really a hero to all of us," Tulane head coach Curtis Johnson said. "I don't know if anyone could go through what he has experienced in two or three lifetimes. He is an inspiration to me, my family, our football team and the entire Tulane and New Orleans communities."

Kelley, and last year's Disney Spirit Award recipient, University of Texas player Nate Boyer, will present the award during *The Home Depot College Football Awards* at Walt Disney World Resort on Dec. 12. The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual awards show - hosted by ESPN's Chris Fowler, Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit, Desmond Howard and Samantha Ponder - will once again air on ESPN at 7 p.m. and originate from the Atlantic Dance Hall at Disney's BoardWalk at the Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

*The Cree Lighting Red Carpet Special at the Home Depot College Football Awards* hosted by Ponder, Tom Rinaldi and Dari Nowkhah - will air at 6:00 p.m. on ESPNU and *The Home Depot College Football Awards Recap Special* will air after the show at 9:00 p.m. on ESPNU.

Walker becomes the 18<sup>th</sup> recipient of the award, joining past honorees Daniel Huffman (1996), Dwight Collins (1997), Matt Hartl (1998), East Carolina University (1999), Hameen Ali (2000), the United States Service Academy football teams (2001), Dewayne White (2002), Neil Parry (2003), Tim Frisby (2004), the Tulane University football team (2005), University of Louisville band member Patrick Henry Hughes (2006), Zerbin Singleton (2007), Tim Tebow (2008), Mark Herzlich (2009), D.J. Williams (2010), Carson Tinker and the University of Alabama (2011) and Nate Boyer (2012).

Last year's recipient, Nate Boyer, who never played football before walking on to the Texas Longhorns team, received the award for his service to the U.S. Army Special Forces Unit and work with Darfur refugee camps.

In 2011, Alabama was selected for its extraordinary efforts to aid tornado victims and help rebuild the Tuscaloosa, Ala., community. The team ultimately brought much needed hope to the area before eventually earning the BCS National Championship in January 2012.

Williams was chosen in 2010 for his courage in overcoming a childhood fractured by an alcoholic, drug-addicted and abusive father. He used his personal struggle to raise awareness and inspire others to abandon troubled relationships and seek help.

In 2009, Herzlich, now a New York Giants linebacker, was selected after overcoming a rare form of bone cancer and helping inspire more than \$120,000 in donations for cancer-related causes.

Tebow was chosen in 2008 because of his remarkable humanitarian efforts in support of less fortunate people in the U.S. and abroad.

## Disney Sports Spirit Award Recipients:

Date	Recipient	School (Hometown)
1996	Daniel Huffman	Rossville High School (Rossville, Ill.)
1997	Dwight Collins	University of Central Florida (Lake Charles, La.)
1998	Matt Hartl	Northwestern University (Denver, Colo.)
1999	East Carolina University *	East Carolina University (Greenville, N.C.)
2000	Hameen Ali	College of William & Mary (Dover, Del.)

2001	U.S. Air Force Academy **U.S. Military Academy **U.S. Naval Academy **	U.S. Air Force Academy (Colorado Springs, Colo.)U.S. Military Academy (West Point, N.Y.)U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis, Md.)
2002	Dewayne White	University of Louisville (Marbury, Ala.)
2003	Neil Parry	San Jose State University (Sonoma, Calif.)
2004	Tim Frisby	University of South Carolina (Allentown, Pa.)
2005	Tulane University*	Tulane University (New Orleans, La.)
2006	Patrick Henry Hughes	University of Louisville (Louisville, Ky.)
2007	Zerbin Singleton	United States Naval Academy (Annapolis, Md.)
2008	Tim Tebow	University of Florida (Jacksonville, Fla.)
2009	Mark Herzlich	Boston College (Wayne, Pa.)
2010	D.J. Williams	University of Arkansas (Little Rock, Ark.)
2011	Carson Tinker*	University of Alabama (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)
2012	Nate Boyer	University of Texas (Austin, Tex.)
2013	Devon Walker	Tulane University (Destrehan, La.)

\* presented to entire football team

\*\* presented to football teams at all three service academies

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**MEDIA NOTE:** Media interested in attending *The Home Depot College Football Awards* can apply for credentials by emailing Elizabeth McCollum at [elizabethm@bzapr.com](mailto:elizabethm@bzapr.com).