

# Oklahoma Sooners' Bob Stoops and Sterling Shepard to Accept 2014 Disney Sports Spirit Award

## ***Coach and player developed inspirational bond from tragic death of former Sooners receiver Derrick Shepard 15 years ago***

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (Nov. 17, 2014) – Oklahoma Sooners coach Bob Stoops and junior wide receiver Sterling Shepard will receive this year's Disney Sports Spirit Award – an honor given annually by Disney Sports to college football's most inspirational figure – at *The Home Depot College Football Award* on Dec. 11 at Walt Disney World Resort.

Following the tragic death of former Sooners receiver and graduate assistant coach Derrick Shepard, Stoops selflessly became a father figure to Derrick Shepard's six-year-old son Sterling Shepard and welcomed him into the Sooners family. In a remarkable twist of fate, that fatherless young boy grew into a superstar football player who, at the end of his high school career in suburban Oklahoma City, fittingly signed to play for the University of Oklahoma where he is among the top receivers in college football.

"Words cannot express my gratitude to Coach Stoops for allowing me to grow up around the only football team I ever wanted to join, the Oklahoma Sooners!" said Sterling Shepard. "To wear No. 3 like my Dad, to play on the same field as my two uncles, Woodie and Darrell, it's been a dream come true every day. I'm humbled to accept this honor on behalf of my mom, my sisters and my entire family. And when I say family, that includes Coach Stoops and everyone associated with Oklahoma Football."

**Video:** Oklahoma Director of Athletics Joe Castiglione announced Sterling Shepard and Coach Stoops with the Disney Spirit Award during a [press conference](#) on Monday, Nov. 17.

Sterling Shepard has inspired the college football world with his remarkable perseverance in overcoming the loss of his father while climbing his way to the top of college football.

"Derrick Shepard's legacy lives on through his son, Sterling, who I'm privileged to coach," said Coach Bob Stoops. "I've been blessed to watch Sterling grow into a talented young man who serves as a tremendous example for our entire team in all that he does."

When Stoops arrived in Norman, Okla. in Dec. 1998, he met a graduate assistant coach, Derrick Shepard, a former OU star receiver who he knew had the skill to become a great coach. Stoops helped Shepard, who had a wife and three young children at the time, land a full-time assistant coaching job at Wyoming. Weeks after Derrick Shepard arrived in Wyoming with his family still in Oklahoma, he died of a sudden heart attack at the age of 35.

Soon after, Stoops and his assistant coaches began taking an interest in Derrick Shepard's son, Sterling, attending his youth flag football practices and essentially filling the role a departed father could not. For the next eight seasons, Stoops made sure Sterling always had a second family – the Sooner family. It was the natural thing to do for Stoops who lost his own father to a sudden heart attack just as his illustrious coaching career was beginning.

"When we're talking about a six-year-old boy, you have no idea he's going to play football for you," Stoops said. "It wasn't about that. It was about a young man being able to experience what his father would have gave him."

Fast forward to 2009-10 and Sterling Shepard was becoming an incredible talent at wide receiver, just like his father. Stoops began to recruit the talented receiver and ultimately the younger Shepard signed with the only team and coach he had ever wanted to play for.

"While we all miss Derrick deeply, the Disney Sports Spirit Award is wonderful recognition of his competitive spirit, as well as the strength of his wife, Cheri, who has done an amazing job raising Sterling and his two sisters," said Stoops.

Stoops has a long history of helping those in need, in particular disadvantaged kids. His Bob Stoops Champions Foundation benefits disadvantaged and ill children in the Oklahoma City and Norman areas. Since its inception in 2000, the Champions Foundation has contributed more than \$1.2 million to worthy causes such as March of Dimes, Infant Crisis Center, OU Children's Hospital, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Make-a-Wish Foundation, and many other local charities. Through his foundation, Stoops helped support Corey Wilson, a former Sooners receiver who was paralyzed following a car accident in Feb. 2009, throughout his recovery and rehabilitation.

"Bob Stoops and Sterling Shepard exemplify everything the Disney Sports Spirit Award stands for in very different ways," said Faron Kelley, director of sports marketing strategy for Disney Sports. "Bob for his selflessness and willingness to put the needs of others ahead of his own and Sterling for his perseverance and ability to not only overcome such a traumatic experience, but to thrive in spite of that experience."

Kelley will present the award during *The Home Depot College Football Awards* at Walt Disney World Resort on Dec. 11. The 24<sup>th</sup> annual awards show will once again air on ESPN at 7 p.m. EST and originate from the Atlantic Dance Hall at Disney's BoardWalk at the Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

*The Red Carpet Special at The Home Depot College Football Awards* will air at 6 p.m. on ESPNU and *Championship Drive CFB Playoff Preview* will air after the show at 9 p.m. on ESPN.

Stoops and Sterling Shepard become the 19<sup>th</sup> recipients of the award, joining past honorees which include Devon Walker (2013), Nate Boyer (2012), Carson Tinker and the University of Alabama (2011), D.J. Williams (2010), Mark Herzlich (2009) and Tim Tebow (2008).

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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).