

University of Iowa Football Program Named 2017 Disney Sports Spirit Award Winner

Football program lauded for its inspirational “Kinnick Wave” to patients at nearby children’s hospital

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (Nov. 20, 2017) – The 2017 Disney Sports Spirit Award will be presented to the University of Iowa this year.

Disney Sports announced the selection on Nov. 20 and will present the award to the school during *The Home Depot College Football Awards presented by GILDAN*, which are televised live on ESPN on Dec. 7 at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta.

The Hawkeye program is a first-time recipient of the award given annually to college football’s most inspirational player, coach, team or figure. The program earned the award after launching a heart-warming tradition this season that is touching the lives of scores of young patients housed at a nearby children’s hospital.

On Sept. 2, shortly after opening the University of Iowa’s Stead Family’s Children’s Hospital that sits virtually next door to the team’s Kinnick Stadium, a new tradition was started during Hawkeye home football games.

At the end of the first quarter, the stadium announcer encourages the roughly 70,000 fans who attend every home game to stand and wave to the young patients at the children’s hospital. Word spread quickly inside the hospital, and more and more patients made their way to the hospital’s upper floors which provide an unobstructed view of the football field below.

And they started waving back.

As the season progressed, opposing players began joining the wave. Even the game’s referees have gotten in on what’s now affectionately called the “Kinnick Wave.” In its wake have come stories of young patients who have been moved to embrace a more hopeful outlook despite their illness.

“First and foremost, we are excited to have been selected the 2017 winner of the Disney Sports Spirit Award,” said Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz. “I don’t believe anyone would have imagined the wave — “The Kinnick Wave” — would have become such a universal show of support. It’s a simple way for 70,000 people to recognize the kids, the parents and hospital staff who are the real champions, fighting every day to overcome significant medical challenges. I’m proud that a kind gesture has had a profoundly positive impact on so many people in our state and the nation. We are honored and proud to be part of the Kinnick Wave.”

Disney Sports Vice President Faron Kelley, who will be in Atlanta to present the award to Coach Ferentz, said

the “Kinnick Wave” has had a significant impact all over the state of Iowa.

“The impact these fans are having on the lives of those young patients probably can’t be fully measured,” said Kelley. “Waving at them is seemingly a simple gesture but the effect it’s having on those kids should be an inspiration to all of us, and that’s why we so enthusiastically chose the Iowa football program for this coveted award.”

The Iowa football program becomes the 22nd recipient of the award, joining past honorees James Connor (2016), Hank Goff (2015), Bob Stoops and Sterling Shepard (2014), 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), among others. The award was first given in 1996 to Rossville High School’s Daniel Huffman.

Kelley will present the award during ***The Home Depot College Football Awards presented by GILDAN on Dec. 7***, airing on ESPN at 7 p.m. EST. The show – hosted by ESPN’s Chris Fowler; and joined by Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit, Desmond Howard, Maria Taylor and Tom Rinaldi – will originate from the College Football Hall of Fame and Chick-fil-A Fan Experience in Atlanta.