



ARMED FORCES MERIT AWARD

Media Conference
Presented by the Football Writers Association of America
November 11, 2025

TIM SIMMONS: Hello, everyone. I'm Tim Simmons. I coordinate the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers Association of America. Welcome to everybody. We're here today to make an announcement about the 14th recipient of the award.

Brant, turn it over to you.

BRANT RINGLER: Thank you, Tim. Thank you, everybody, for being on this Zoom today.

First, I want to say thank you to all the men and women that have served our country and continue to serve our country. It's without you that we're able to have these freedoms that we enjoy in everyday life. So thank you very much for all that you do.

And, Levi, congratulations on receiving the Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Merit Award presented by the Football Writers Association of America. Well-deserved. You are the epitome of this award, for your service not only in the Marines; but you continue to serve. You're serving your teammates. You're serving your coaching staff. You're helping everybody become a better person and better player each and every day.

And this is the reason you won this award. So keep up the great work, and we look forward to seeing your continued success on and off the field.

LEVI MOELL: Thank you. I appreciate it.

TIM SIMMONS: Now to present Bill Bender, Football Writers President.

BILL BENDER: I was researching this, Levi. Obviously on behalf of Lockheed Martin Armed Forces and Football Writers Association of America, we're very proud to have you win this award.

I was looking at the past award winners from 2012, and there's some impressive names on this list. When I started doing some research on you, like I said, when I came in, right out of the go, looked at your high school, West Liberty Salem High School.



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was thinking a lot of guys that I played with high school football, way back 25 years ago, every kid in Ohio, I bet you they had two or three guys that were in the service that they played with. I knew ours happened to be one of the toughest kids on the team. Right when I saw that, I said, Well, we know Levi is a tough kid.

And then watching the video where they called you "Red Leader," and you are thinking, "Yeah, that makes sense." And you switch a position, do things for the team.

I read Tom Archdeacon's feature on you in the Daily News. There was a quote. You said, "As a kid I read a lot of books and watched movies. That could be it. And our family has a great respect for the military." That's a lot of kids in Ohio grew up there. Obviously you have that respect, but you went out and put your name it. That's something we definitely appreciate so, so much.

I have covered football for Sporting News for several years. We always take a personal interest in service academy football. We had a feature about Blake Horvath last week. It means something to me to point those out, especially on a day like today.

It's an added bonus that an Ohio he kid wins the award. Really proud of what you have done. Really proud of the University of Dayton. It was awesome seeing you carry the American flag out on the field.

You guys do have amazing uniforms, by the way, I mean, on top of everything else. It matches perfectly. I think you embody everything that this award is about. I'm sure everyone in this room would agree to that.

We are really proud of you. Looking forward to seeing what you guys do the rest of the season and beyond. Couldn't be happier to have your name on the award. Sorry if I talked too much.

LEVI MOELL: Thank you.

COACH TREVOR ANDREWS: I first learned about this award even existed a few months back. Our sports information staff was considering nominating Levi for it. I did some research myself on it, and came to find out what it was, what it embodied. I was like, "Yeah, he's got to win this thing. We got to do it."

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I started writing my statement. I was going to just write something brief. As I started writing it, it turned into a page and a half pretty quick.

There's so many things about Levi Moell that I respect and appreciate. Here's a young man -- I got here three seasons ago. He was already on the team. He had walked on. I got to learn about his story a little bit. But he's persevered through some -- it wasn't easy. You try out for the team and you make it and you feel good about yourself. And now you got to start trying to work your way up the depth chart.

He was a receiver when I first got here. We decided to ask if he was interested in moving to running back a couple months ago. I think he was excited about that opportunity and to get back to his roots. Really, we asked him to make that move because it was just more of a depth issue. But I was really pleased with the way he took to it and moved his way up the depth chart.

But the football on-the-field stuff is one thing. Here's a guy that's married, right? His wife Sidney is putting up with us taking him for 20 hours a week on top of his academics, right? So kudos to you, Sidney, for allowing him to do it.

He's a nontraditional student. He's four years older than everybody else on the team when he started. Now he's in his fourth year and been grinding and working through injuries.

But he embodies so many things, like core values, right? Number one, he's competitive, which I really appreciate.

Number two, leadership. He's been through -- three months before he got here he was shooting machine guns. He's lived real-life experiences.

I already mentioned that he's married. So he instantly has a different perspective on everything that we do than everybody else on our football team. I value that because real-life experience and a different perspective and a willingness to help with the younger guys -- the "Red Leader" thing came about because of who he was. He was showing an interest of going into the field of strength and conditioning. I wanted to give him an opportunity to earn some hours in there and work towards that goal down the road.



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I'm a Star Wars fan, so I started calling him "Red Leader." But he stuck to that. It wasn't so much that I wanted him in there to be working with him on technique and things like that. I wanted him to be there to be an encourager and set the tone with your attitude and effort in the weight room.

So he led our freshmen a year ago, working with them. On the field, it hasn't been easy for him. But last spring, I thought he really took some strides. And again in fall camp, I think he just continued to take some strides and work his way up the depth chart.

Unfortunately, he twisted his ankle and fell in a foxhole. He's back now and working. But his attitude and effort through all that stuff has been outstanding.

The last thing I'll hit on is his growth, right? Levi never stops trying to learn and improve himself on a daily basis, whether that's in the classroom, whether that's on the practice field, whether that's in the weight room. He's not a scream-and-yell leader guy, but he's a perspective and put your arm around you and an encourager. We need more of those guys in this world. He does a great job with it.

I was super excited to support this and couldn't be more thrilled for him to win this award. So congratulations. Thanks to the sportswriters. Thanks to Lockheed Martin for voting for this young man because he definitely embodies everything that it's about.

TIM SIMMONS: Levi, what does this award mean, especially getting on ESPN?

LEVI MOELL: I mean, I'm not one for the attention or anything really like that. I'm glad that University of Dayton football can get some attention on the national stage and everything like that. It's a great program, great people here, great coaches, players, all the support staff, everything like that. I'm glad that we can bring a little attention on them.

TIM SIMMONS: Levi, why did you pick Dayton when you were coming out of the service?



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LEVI MOELL: I really just wanted to pick something that was close to home. I was looking for, like, basically the biggest program that I thought I could make the team on. So Dayton was a perfect fit, and I'm so glad I did because there's so many things about it that I had no idea when I decided. I got lucky with how it turned out.

BILL BENDER: Obviously that leadership role, how do you believe you have taken that on at Dayton? Obviously, it's one thing to be just called the older guy and the married guy and the military guy. But what have you learned about leadership that translated maybe from the Marines to the football team?

LEVI MOELL: I really think I just learned not to be scared to be a leader. There's a lot of times where people feel like, I don't know if people want to listen me talk about this. I don't know if it really matters what I say. I felt like that for a long time through the Marine Corps and even when I started here at Dayton.

But really just embracing the fact that maybe people look at you different and maybe there are ways that you can affect the people around you, is kind of how I have grown in that way.

BILL BENDER: I would say, your coach (Trevor Andrews) said attitude and effort. I have used those phrases with my kids over the years, too. Those are the things you can control, right? Was that part of what went into the idea of you switching positions? That's never easy.

LEVI MOELL: Maybe a little bit. I don't really know. That's kind of more the coaching staff decided. I was kind of struggling at receiver, so it was more maybe a fit with talent and my strengths and stuff like that. Maybe my mindset and my mental is part of that, too. Not really sure.

TIM SIMMONS: Coming out of high school, obviously you said you weren't really ready for college. Why did you pick the Marines?

LEVI MOELL: The military was always something that I wanted to do. And the Marine Corps just kind of spoke to me in a special way.

We're the best as far as the four branches go. They sold me on that. Cool uniforms (laughter). I had friends who had joined the Marine Corps, also, that kind of helped me decide on the Marine Corps.



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Really, I just thought they were cool.

TIM SIMMONS: During your military service, what were some of the key moments in military? And what did you do in the military?

LEVI MOELL: When I was in, I was in the infantry. I was a machine gunner.

Key moments? I mean, it's really just a conglomeration of the whole thing. Just everything you go through. You're constantly going through something that's difficult mentally or physically. I don't know if there's really a specific moment that sticks out. It's just more that there's always something coming up, there's always something hard, there's always something you got to prepare for mentally. And learning how to handle myself in those situations is the big thing.

TIM SIMMONS: Have any players on the Dayton roster ever talked to you about military and why you elected to go there?

LEVI MOELL: Yeah, I mean, of course. I'm sure they're curious about that kind of thing. Yes, we talk about it a decent amount. At this point, I have been here for three years, so maybe not as much as before, but yeah.

TIM SIMMONS: What will you do in the future after you graduate?

LEVI MOELL: I'm hoping to go to physical therapy school, become a physical therapist. So going through the application process with that right now.

TIM SIMMONS: Does Dayton have a physical therapist school, or do you have to go someplace else?

LEVI MOELL: Dayton does have one, yeah.

TIM SIMMONS: You might be taping ankles there next year, huh?

LEVI MOELL: Hopefully. They haven't accepted me yet.



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COACH ANDREWS: He will send them back out on the field, tell them to get out of the training room.

TIM SIMMONS: Coach, have you ever had a military person on your roster, or is Levi the first?

COACH ANDREWS: That's a great question. I have had ROTC guys. I coached at William and Mary for a long time, and we had a strong ROTC program there. I really got to know the Sergeant Gualano Davis who headed that unit up. I became very good friends with him, and I still communicate with him on a regular basis.

I grew up in the middle of farm country in Indiana, right? So there weren't a lot -- I had buddies that went off and went into a different branch here or there. But I didn't really know the day-to-day of it and what it really entailed.

Then when I moved to Virginia and I was out there, you're right in the middle of everything, right? In Williamsburg, Fort Eustis was right down the road. You had Oceana right there. You were two hours, an hour and a half from Washington. We had every branch right there. Camp Peary was in Williamsburg.

So I got to meet a lot more people, and my neighbors were in the military. I really identified with a lot of those guys.

When it comes to a football team, you have got some ROTC guys and you have a ton of respect for them because you know how hard we train in football. But they got to get up two hours before you start that to get their stuff in, and they're still taking classes. So you get to appreciate that.

One of my teammates when I played here at Dayton in the '90s, Matt Deters, was an ROTC guy and he was a captain and he had to work around a lot of hurdles to be able to do that. And then went on to serve. He actually just sent me a text message yesterday from Rome. He's standing wearing a Dayton football T-shirt, standing in the Coliseum. I thought that was pretty cool.



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I just love the perspective that they have on things. They've lived real life. We have student-athletes that think it's hard when it's 90 degrees in training camp and we have been grinding for 14 days. It's not compared to what some of those guys go through, the mental and physical fatigue. I love having him on the team because of that.

BRANT RINGLER: Levi, when you were serving with all your brothers and sisters in arms and you're thinking about playing football, was there anybody else -- or do you know of anybody that has served, has come back to play football? Because this is a very special award to us. And it's very hard, honestly, to find people like yourself that are coming back into the football space and playing.

So if you have anybody out there, we would love to hear about those people.

LEVI MOELL: No. I don't really think, as far as off the top of my head, that there's anybody I knew personally who'd done that. I just knew that I could. I had eligibility, and I wanted to, so I just went for it.

BRANT RINGLER: Fantastic.

TIM SIMMONS: I have tried to reach out to the American Football Coaches about becoming involved with this. I know there's a lot of veterans. Maybe you could tell Craig Bohl to give us a little help.

COACH ANDREWS: I will see what I can do there. There's several committees, and I'll touch base with him when we have our convention in January.

Is he going to get to go to the Armed Forces Bowl now? Is that what's going on here? New Year's Eve in Fort Worth. There you go.

TIM SIMMONS: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Athletics Communications Department at Dayton, Ross and everybody, and Doug, for putting this together.

Bill, thank you very much, and Brant.

And again, Levi, congratulations on this very special day as the 14th recipient of the Lockheed Martin



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LEVI MOELL: Thank you. Thank you for thinking I'm worth it.