

WCAP NCO, 2016 Paralympian Will Receive Pat Tillman Award for Service at ESPYs

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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The accolades keep coming for Sgt. Elizabeth Marks.

Marks, a combat medic and member of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program of Fort Carson, Colorado, just finished securing her spot during the weekend on the U.S. Paralympic swim team that will compete at the 2016 Rio Paralympics in September. The honor, the first for a WCAP swimmer, comes less than two months after Marks made international headlines for a gracious gesture after claiming her fourth gold medal at the 2016 Invictus Games.

This week Marks — who is ranked No. 1 in the world in the 100-meter breaststroke — will be in the limelight again when she is presented with the Pat Tillman Award for Service during the 2016 ESPYs in Los Angeles. The awards show, which recognizes grand sports achievements, will be broadcast live at 8 p.m. EDT Wednesday on ABC.

“The Pat Tillman Award for Service honors those individuals who inspire us with their service

and selflessness,” said Connor Schell, senior vice president, ESPN Films and Original Entertainment, who oversees The ESPYs. “Sgt. Elizabeth Marks — this year’s recipient — is an athlete of remarkable courage and perseverance who has made extraordinary sacrifices in her own life to help others and serve our country. She represents the best of our country and we are proud to present her with this award.”

Marks grabbed worldwide attention in May after she was decorated with her final gold medal at the Invictus Games in Orlando. The award was presented by Prince Harry, the British royal who created the competition, an international Paralympic-style, multi-sport event, which allows wounded, injured or sick armed services personnel and veterans to compete. After he placed the medal around Marks’ neck, the 25-year-old gave the award back.

Marks wanted Prince Harry to deliver the medal to Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England, where she spent the duration of the inaugural Invictus Games in 2014. Marks traveled to London in the fall of that year to compete in the Games when she collapsed with respiratory distress syndrome. Her condition worsened and she was eventually hospitalized and placed on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO, life support to help her breathe. She missed the Games, but Marks said she was fortunate to come back alive. She said donating one of her medals was the only way she could think of to repay the hospital staff.

“It’s the only thing I could give to thank them for saving my life,” Marks said.

Her request was honored June 1 when Harry presented Marks’ gold medal from the 100-meter freestyle event to doctors and nurses from Papworth Hospital during a ceremony at Kensington Palace in London.

Marks’ gesture, along with the courage she has shown in the face of adversity as well as her unwavering commitment to her country, is in line with the ideals of the Pat Tillman Award for Service, said Marie Tillman, president and co-founder of the Pat Tillman Foundation.

“Pat lived his life with passion, intensity and a commitment to help others live up to their potential,” Marie Tillman said. “As a combat medic and now world-class para-swimmer, Sgt. Marks embodies the same strong sense of duty – challenging herself, fellow soldiers and her teammates, physically and mentally, to push limits and achieve their best in spite of injury or other setbacks. In Pat’s name, we’re proud to present the Tillman Award to Sgt. Marks for her service, leadership and incredible poise as she represents Team USA.”

The award was established in 2014 to commemorate the former NFL player and U.S. Army Ranger’s legacy. It is meant to honor an individual with a strong connection to sports who has served others in a way that echoes the legacy of Tillman. Marks will be presented with the award in conjunction with the Pat Tillman Foundation, a national leader in providing academic support and scholarships to veterans, active-duty service members and their spouses. Past

honorees include U.S. Paralympic gold medal sled hockey player and Purple Heart recipient Josh Sweeney (2014); and former Notre Dame basketball player, Iraq war veteran and Purple Heart recipient Danielle Green (2015).

Marks joined the Army at age 17 in July 2008 in Prescott Valley, Arizona. She began swimming in 2012. The water was a means of rehabilitation for the bilateral hip injuries she sustained in 2010 while deployed to Iraq. Marks underwent three surgeries to restructure her hips and regain enough mobility to walk. Swimming was not only a therapeutic endeavor but a challenge that Marks immediately fell in love with. Four months after participating in her first competition she became the first female Paralympic athlete in WCAP.

“I’m just grateful,” Marks told the Army News Service. “I’m excited that I get the chance to represent the United States of America’s colors in any way that I’m allowed.”

John Cena will host Wednesday’s telecast, which will be at the Microsoft Theater. The list of award presenters includes Stephen Curry, Lindsey Vonn, Dwyane Wade and J.J. Watt.