Northern star to get Navy-Marine medal

Tim Leeds  
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A university football player will be honored before the Montana State University-Northern Lights vs. Montana Tech Orediggers game Saturday for going above and beyond the call of duty while serving in the U. S. Marine Corps.

Representatives of the Marines and the U. S. Navy will be at Blue Pony Stadium to present the Navy and Marine Corps Medal to Lights wide receiver Brandon O'Brien for risking his life to save two other members of the Corps who were drowning off a beach near his base.

O'Brien, an Orlando, Fla. native, served in the Marines from 2005 to 2009, in between playing as a starter for the junior varsity team at the University of Kentucky and practicing with the Kentucky Wildcats. He started playing for the Northern Lights in 2010.

He was deployed to many areas, including Iraq, Kenya, Italy and Dubai.

He said in a statement about receiving the medal that the award is for actions he took after he returned from his second deployment.

"It was in the evening, the sun was basically down, there were no lifeguards on duty that late, (there were) cold rough seas, little visibility, and the Marines were approximately 100 yards from the beach out in the water," O'Brien said. "I had no flotation device and I swam out there and got both of them at the same time. When I had gotten them back to the beach, the paramedics had arrived and took the Marines to the hospital."

The medal O'Brien is receiving is the second-highest non-combat award bestowed by the Navy and Marines.

The medal is awarded for "distinguishing oneself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy. For acts of lifesaving, or attempted lifesaving, it is required that the action be performed at the risk of one's own life," the military description of the medal says.

In precedence, the Navy and Marine Corps Medal is one step higher than the Bronze Cross, and one below the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The Navy and Marine Corps Medal was created by an act of Congress on Aug. 7, 1942, and was first awarded during World War II.

While the name of the first recipient of the medal is not known, probably its most famous recipient is President John F. Kennedy, who received the award for saving the lives of injured crew members after his craft, Patrol Torpedo Boat 109, was sunk by an enemy craft in the Pacific theater during World War II.

The medal presentation is expected to take place shortly before the 1 p. m. kickoff, at Blue Pony Stadium.