



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 7 DEC 2023

THE TED HENDRICKS AWARD OUR 21ST YEAR



LAIATU LATU – UCLA

PHOTOS COURTESY UCLA ATHLETICS

CHICAGO, IL – Ted Hendricks and the Ted Hendricks Foundation are thrilled to announce our 2023 recipient for the Ted Hendricks Award! Our guy this season is UCLA’s Laiatu Latu, a senior from Sacramento, CA.

Laiatu is a game-changing presence on the edge and has created havoc for opposing offenses all season. He recorded multiple tackles for loss in seven of his 12 games and finished the season with two three-sack games (Coastal Carolina and Colorado). Performances like this thrust him into the national conversation early in the campaign and Laiatu followed through to the finish. His 1.8 tackles for loss per game lead the FBS and his 1.08 sacks per game rank 4th. Latu’s 21½ total tackles for loss place him just ahead of another Hendricks Award Finalist, Jalen Green of James Madison. Laiatu also edged out Utah’s Jonah Ellis in this year’s balloting.

Latu transferred to the UCLA program after spending an extended stretch of time believing that his football career had ended with a neck injury. While still with his previous team at the University of Washington in 2021, he announced that he was forced to medically retire from football after seeking guidance from several specialists. The original plan was to assist the Husky program as a student assistant. But Laiatu felt that his career was unfinished.

As the weeks and months progressed, Laiatu found that he missed the game dearly and, with the help of his mom, Kerry, decided to revisit the original diagnosis. The search led them to Dr. Robert Watkins at Cedars-Sinai Spine Center in the Los Angeles area. Dr. Watkins was able to surgically repair and fortify the injury site and, eventually, was able to clear him for play again.

UCLA became a logical landing spot for Laiatu when, in late 2021, his former position coach at UW, Ikaika Malloe joined the Bruins staff. The reunion of coach and player paid off in Latu’s first season, as he was named a First-Team All-Pac-12 honoree. He finished the 2022 season with 10½ sacks, which was 2nd in the conference and the most by a UCLA player in a decade.

2023 has brought Laiatu more success than ever and it has confirmed his decision to re-start his career. He is this season’s Lombardi Award winner and a finalist for the Bednarik and Lott IMPACT awards. We are extremely proud to welcome Laiatu Latu to our terrific list of Hendricks Award recipients. What an inspirational story!

The 2023 Hendricks Award trophy presentation will take place early in the year 2024 (time and place to be announced).

As always, the Ted Hendricks Foundation would like to express our gratitude to our Selection Committee members. We hope to hear from you again next season!

Ted Hendricks
Pro Football Hall of Fame ’90

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For more information about the Ted Hendricks Award, please visit TedHendricks.com