

**KEARNEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEBRASKA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 6, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Royce Austen of Kearney High School as its 2018-19 Gatorade Nebraska Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Austen is the first Gatorade Nebraska Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Kearney High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the field, distinguishes Austen as Nebraska's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Austen joins an elite alumni association of past state soccer award-winners, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook High School, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel High School, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, 2002-03, East Brunswick High School, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-04, Blue Valley West High School, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire High School, Mass.) and Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.).

The 5-foot-7, 150-pound senior midfielder scored 16 goals and passed for 16 assists this past season, leading the Bearcats (17-1) to the Class A state quarterfinals. Austen is a two-time First Team All-State selection by both the Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal-Star and concluded his prep soccer career with 63 goals and 35 assists, both school records.

Austen has volunteered locally collecting Christmas gifts for those in need, and he has donated his time as a youth soccer coach. "Royce was the heart and soul of that Kearney team," said Dave Lawrence, head coach of Papillion-La Vista South High. "Besides scoring goals, he works his butt off defensively to pressure and force the flow of the game."

Austen has maintained a B average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Nebraska Wesleyan University this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Austen joins recent Gatorade Nebraska Boys Soccer Players of the Year Peter Novoa (2017-18, Westside High School), Ed Gordon (2016-17 & 2015-16, Creighton Preparatory School), Cullen Fisch (2014-15, Papillion-La Vista South) and Michael Jaime (2013-14, Omaha South High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Austen also has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of his choosing. He is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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