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**MUSKEGON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MICHIGAN BOYS FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 11, 2017) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced La'Darius Jefferson of Muskegon High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Michigan Football Player of the Year. Jefferson is the first Gatorade Michigan Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Muskegon 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 Jefferson as Michigan's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December, Jefferson joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Mitchell Trubisky (2012-13, Mentor High School, Ohio), Greg Olsen (2002-03, Wayne Hills High School, N.J.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06 Highland Park High School, Texas), Harrison Smith (2006-07 Knoxville Catholic High School, Tenn.), Latavius Murray (2007-08, Onondaga High School, N.Y.), Brock Osweiler (2008-09, Flathead High School, Mont.) and Leonard Fournette (2014-15 & 2012-13, St. Augustine High School, La.).

The 6-foot-2, 215-pound senior quarterback rushed for 2,095 yards and 33 touchdowns this past season, leading the Big Reds to a 14-0 record and the Division 3 state championship. Jefferson also completed 67 of 117 passes for 1,205 yards and 21 touchdowns, throwing just two interceptions. He was selected Michigan's Mr. Football, the Associated Press Div. 3-4 Player of the Year and the MLive Player of the Year.

Jefferson has volunteered locally on behalf of an elementary school literacy initiative as well as an emergency food assistance program. "Jefferson is a physical specimen, with size, speed and the arm to go with it," said Kyle Jewett, head coach at Reeths-Puffer High. "What impressed me most was his patience as a runner. He has the unique ability to wait for one seam to open and then explode through it."

Jefferson has maintained a 3.47 GPA in the classroom. He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Jefferson joins recent Gatorade Michigan Football Players of the Year Donovan Peoples-Jones (2016-17, Cass Technical High School), Tony Poljan (2015-16, Lansing Catholic High School), Alex Malzone (2014-15, Brother Rice High School), Travis Smith (2013-14, Ithaca High School), Mark Chapman (2012-13, Port Huron High School), Cooper Rush (2011-12, Lansing Catholic High School), Valdez Showers (2010-11, Madison High School), and Jason Fracassa (2009-10, Stevenson High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Jefferson will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.