

**BLUE VALLEY NORTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS BOYS FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 6, 2018) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Graham Mertz of Blue Valley North High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Kansas Football Player of the Year**. Mertz is the first Gatorade Kansas Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Blue Valley North 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 Mertz as Kansas'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, Mertz joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Emmitt Smith (1986-87, Escambia High School, Fla.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06 Highland Park High School, Texas) and Christian McCaffrey (2012-13, 2013-14, Valor Christian High School, Colo.).

The 6-foot-4, 210-pound senior quarterback passed for 3,886 yards and 51 touchdowns this past season, leading the Mustangs (9-4) to the Class 6A state championship game. Mertz missed nearly two full games early in the season with a knee injury and, upon his return, he reeled off seven straight games with at least five touchdown passes. A U.S. Army All-American Bowl selection, he was the Class 6A Offensive Player of the Year.

Mertz has volunteered locally with the Jessie Rees Foundation's Never Ever Give Up campaign which benefits children with cancer. He has also donated his time as a youth football coach. "Graham is as good as I've seen in my 16 years coaching," said Ryan Cornelson, head coach of Gardner Edgerton High. "His arm strength and accuracy are amazing for a kid his age."

Mertz has maintained a weighted 3.77 GPA in the classroom. He has verbally committed to play football on an athletic scholarship at the University of Wisconsin in the fall of 2019.

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.

Mertz joins recent Gatorade Kansas Football Players of the Year Carter Putz (2017-18 & 2016-17, Bishop Miege High School), Christian Jegen (2015-16, Mill Valley High School), Denzel Goolsby (2014-15, Bishop Carroll Catholic High School), and Joe Dineen (2013-14, Free State High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Mertz 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.