

**GULFPORT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 6, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Ashton LeBlanc of Gulfport High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year**. LeBlanc is the second Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Gulfport 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 LeBlanc as Mississippi'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, LeBlanc 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 6-foot, 180-pound senior defender led the Admirals to a 19-2-4 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. LeBlanc anchored a defense that allowed just 16 goals in 25 games and recorded 12 shutouts. A two-time First Team All-State selection, he also chipped in offensively with three goals and two assists.

A member of the Model United Nations team at Gulfport High, LeBlanc has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach. "Ashton was a presence on the pitch, no matter what," said Jeff French, head coach of Ocean Springs High. "He was cool, calm and collected when we pressed them, and he was a vocal leader for them as well."

LeBlanc has maintained an A-minus average in the classroom. He has signed a national letter of intent to play soccer on scholarship at the University of Tulsa 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.

Two-time winner LeBlanc joins Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Players of the Year Sumner Richardson (2016-17, Northwest Rankin High School), Ridge Brohaugh (2015-16, Madison Central High School), Wanner Paiz (2014-15, Terry High School) and Ridge Brohaugh (2013-14, Madison Central High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," LeBlanc 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](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).