

**WADE HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA 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 **Ben Erkens of Wade Hampton High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year**. Erkens is the first Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Wade Hampton 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 Erkens as South Carolina'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, Erkens 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 6-foot-1, 180-pound junior midfielder and forward scored 24 goals and passed for 19 assists this past season, leading the Generals (16-6) to the Class AAAAA state tournament second round. A First Team All-State selection, Erkens is a member of the U.S. Youth Soccer Region III Olympic Development Program team. He concluded his junior year with 36 goals and 49 assists in his prep soccer career.

An officer with his local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Erkens has volunteered locally as a youth camp counselor, and he has donated his time to multiple fundraising campaigns to benefit the Wade Hampton athletic department. "Ben Erkens is strong on set pieces, has a dangerous long throw and is physically very strong," said Brian Dender, head coach of J.L. Mann High. "He had a big impact in games."

Erkens has maintained a weighted 4.62 GPA in the classroom. He has made a verbal commitment to play soccer on scholarship at Clemson University beginning in the fall of 2020.

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.

Erkens joins recent Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Players of the Year Charlie Marino (2017-18, Wando High School), Wyatt Millard (2016-17, Cardinal Newman High School), Marcelo Malpartida (2015-16, River Bluff High School), Michele Bottari (2014-15, J.L. Mann) and Tyler Rider (2013-14, J.L. Mann Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

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

###