

## **NIXA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MISSOURI FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 5, 2025) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Jackson Cantwell of Nixa High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Missouri Football Player of the Year.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation's best high school athletes for their excellence in sport, academics and community. The award recognizes Cantwell as Missouri's best high school football player, and he's also been selected as a finalist for the distinguished Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December. Cantwell joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Peyton Manning (1993-94, Isidore Newman School, LA), Nick Singleton (2021-22, Governor Mifflin High School, PA) and Keelon Russell (2024-25, Duncanville High School, TX).

At the time of his selection, the 6-foot-8, 305-pound senior left tackle had led the Eagles to a 13-0 record and a berth in the Class 6 state championship game. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, Cantwell anchored an offensive line that cleared lanes for an attack that averaged 45.8 points per game and 9.7 yards per play entering the title game. A two-time Gatorade Boys Track & Field State Player of the Year, Cantwell amassed 173 pancake blocks through 13 games. He's ranked as the No. 1 recruit in the Class of 2026 by On3.com.

A regular at Nixa's weekly Leadership Academy, a meeting that explores leadership skills, Cantwell has volunteered locally at the Least of These Food Pantry, the only full-service pantry serving Christian County. He has also donated his time as a peer tutor and a youth track coach. "Jackson is probably one of the best offensive linemen that I've ever seen play," said Curtis Jasper, head coach of Joplin High School. "He has a big impact on Nixa's success. He sets the standard for their team both on the field and in the weight room."

Cantwell has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. At the time of his selection, he had made a verbal commitment to receive athletic aid to play football at the University of Miami next fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one state winner from each of the 50 states and Washington D.C., in 12 different sports: football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, baseball, softball, boys and girls soccer, and boys and girls track & field. In total, 610 high school athletes are honored each year. From the pool of state winners, one national winner is selected in each of the 12 sports. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the winners in each sport.

As part of Gatorade's commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$6.4 million in grants to winners across more than 2,200 organizations.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit [playeroftheyear.gatorade.com](https://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://x.com/Gatorade).

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