

## **WEST ORANGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW JERSEY BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 12, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Marcus Jackson of West Orange High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade New Jersey Boys Soccer 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 Jackson as New Jersey’s best high school boys soccer player, and he joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Alecko Eskandarian (1999-00, Bergen Catholic High School, New Jersey), Cristian Roldan (2012-13, El Rancho High School, California) and Dan Klink (2024-25, Loyola Blakefield, Maryland).

The 6-foot-4, 190-pound senior defender led the Mountaineers to a 22-2 record and the Section 1, Group 4 state championship this past season. Jackson scored 18 goals and passed for 5 assists despite being a defensive anchor as a center back. He anchored a back line that recorded 10 shutouts and surrendered only 14 goals on the year. Ranked as the nation’s No. 58 recruit by Prep Soccer, he was a 2026 TopDrawer Soccer U19 MLS Next Flex Best Performer honoree for club play. The NJ.Com New Jersey High School Player of the Year and a TopDrawer Soccer Fall Best XI First Team selection, he was also named the 2025-26 United Soccer Coaches National High School Player of the Year.

Jackson has volunteered locally on behalf of Parent Supports and Teen Enrichment programming at Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia, contributing to youth development and family-empowerment initiatives. He also donated his time generously to the Holy Trinity Food Shelter, in addition to providing childcare support for the Kelly Elementary School PTA, helping to create opportunities for family engagement within the school community. Jackson has participated in his school’s Move the Spectrum event as well, supporting intellectually challenged and autistic students through an initiative focused on inclusion, joy and connection through sports. He has also served as a counselor and coach at DNS Soccer development youth camps and clinics. “Defenders are often overlooked for honors or accolades, but Marcus Jackson is a rare exception,” said JR Eskilson, Prep Soccer National Analyst. “An undeniable talent, Jackson is the player whom opposing coaches were forced to game-plan around and whom opponents marveled at. The center-back put together a dominant defensive campaign as a senior along with exceptional offensive output. He is a two-way impact player who displays the traits of an elite, modern center-back: excellent 1v1 defending, composure in possession and unrivaled success in aerial duels. Jackson put together an epic season and showed why he’s among the best in the high school game.”

Jackson has maintained a 3.55 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to play soccer on scholarship at UCLA this 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X (Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://x.com/Gatorade).

###