

**Contact: Ashley Ginascol (312-729-3622)**

**PETAL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 1, 2011) — In its 27<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Anthony Alford of Petal High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Mississippi Football Player of the Year. Alford is the first Gatorade Mississippi Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Petal 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 Alford as Mississippi's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award announced in December, Alford joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Wes Welker (1999-00, Heritage Hall HS, Okla.), Terrell Suggs (1999-00, Hamilton HS, Ariz.), Anquan Boldin (1998-99, Pahokee HS, Fla.) and Jerome Bettis (1989-90, Mackenzie HS, Mich.).

The state's returning Gatorade Football Player of the Year, the 6-foot-1, 210-pound senior quarterback has led the Panthers to a 10-4 record and a berth in the Class 6A state final against Olive Branch High, scheduled for Dec. 2. Alford passed for 1,892 yards and 17 touchdowns through 14 games, completing 98-of-200 attempts while throwing nine interceptions. A standout outfielder for the Petal baseball team and a member of the 2010 USA Junior Olympic National Team, Alford has also rushed for 1,524 yards and 21 touchdowns on 256 carries in 2011. A U.S. Army All-American Game selection, he is the No. 98 rated recruit in the Class of 2012 by ESPN.

Alford has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. A member of his local Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, he has volunteered locally as a Big Brother/Big Sister mentor and as a youth baseball coach.

"Anthony's numbers speak for themselves," said Steve Buckley, Petal High head coach. "The statistics he has compiled were accomplished against the best competition in the state. He is an amazing player."

Alford remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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. The selection process is administered by ESPNHS and the Gatorade high school sports leadership team, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Alford joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Football Players of the Year Dylan Favre (2009-10, St. Stanislaus College), Tyler Russell (2008-09, Meridian High School) and Charles Mitchell (2007-08, Clarksdale) among the state's list of former award winners.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners, and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit [playeroftheyear.gatorade.com](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

###