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**MIDDLETOWN HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® CONNECTICUT FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 5, 2013) — In its 29th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Dario Highsmith of Middletown High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade Connecticut Football Player of the Year. Highsmith is the first Gatorade Connecticut Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Middletown 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 Highsmith as Connecticut's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award announced in December, Highsmith 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 5-foot-10, 185-pound junior quarterback and defensive back has led the Blue Dragons to an 11-1 record and a berth in the Class L state semifinals against Darien High, scheduled for Dec. 7. At the time of his selection, Highsmith had rushed for 2,565 yards and 27 touchdowns on 219 carries and thrown for 895 yards and nine TDs on 31-of-52 passing. On defense, the 2012 Central Connecticut Conference Division II West First Team honoree had recorded 39 tackles, four interceptions and one fumble recovery.

Highsmith has maintained a B average in the classroom. He has volunteered locally as a youth football coach and mentor.

"Dario Highsmith is extremely fast, has great vision and is very durable," said John Campanello, head coach of Wethersfield High. "He has had big games all year no matter who they played. To have a chance at beating Middletown you have to stop Dario."

Highsmith will begin his senior year of high school in the fall of 2014.

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 the Gatorade high school sports leadership team in partnership with [USA TODAY High School Sports](#), 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.

Highsmith joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Football Players of the Year Colin Moore (2012-2013, Avon High School), Casey Cochran (2011-12 & 2010-11, Masuk High School), Kevin Pierre-Louis (2009-10, King Low Heywood Thomas), Mike Osiecki (2008-09, Seymour High School) and Alex Thomas (2007-08, Ansonia) 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 www.gatorade.com/poy.

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