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**NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 12, 2016) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Ben Mason of Newtown High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Connecticut Football Player of the Year. Mason is the first Gatorade Connecticut Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Newtown 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 Mason as Connecticut's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December, Collins joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Anquan Boldin (1998-99, Pahokee HS, Fla.), Greg Olsen (2002-03, Wayne Hills HS, N.J.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06 Highland Park HS, Texas), Harrison Smith (2006-07 Knoxville Catholic High School, Tenn.), Latavius Murray (2007-08, Onondaga HS, N.Y.), Brock Osweiler (2008-09, Flathead High School, Mont.) and Leonard Fournette (2012-13, 2014-15, St. Augustine HS, La.)

The 6-foot-3, 245-pound senior linebacker and fullback rushed for 719 yards and 11 touchdowns this past season, leading the Nighthawks (10-1) to the Class LL state quarterfinals. Mason also caught 15 passes for 188 yards and three scores. On defense, Mason recorded 63 tackles and two interceptions while forcing two fumbles. Newtown allowed 10.4 points per game during the regular season with four shutouts, but the Nighthawks gave up 55 points in the state quarterfinals when Mason was sidelined with a torn meniscus in his left knee.

Mason has maintained a weighted 3.78 GPA in the classroom. A peer Latin tutor, he has volunteered locally as part of a fundraising campaign to benefit cancer research in addition to serving as a youth football coach.

"Ben's stature alone makes him an imposing run defender, and his speed makes running away from his side of the field almost impossible," said James Reed, head coach of Pomperaug High. "A player of Ben's caliber raises the level of the entire defense."

Mason has verbally committed to play football on an athletic scholarship at the University of Michigan in the fall of 2017.

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 Player of the Year Selection Committee, 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.

Mason joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Football Players of the Year Mark Evanchick (2015-16, Darien High School), Zach Allen (2014-15, New Canaan High School), Dario Highsmith (2013-14, Middletown High School), Colin Moore (2012-13, Avon High School), Casey Cochran (2011-12 & 2010-11, Masuk High School), and Kevin Pierre-Louis (2009-10, King School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Mason will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. 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.