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**LAS CRUCES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEW MEXICO BOYS FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 11, 2017) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Brandon Baeza of Las Cruces High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade New Mexico Football Player of the Year. Baeza is the second Gatorade New Mexico Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Las Cruces 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 Baeza as New Mexico'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, Baeza joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Mitchell Trubisky (2012-13, Mentor High School, Ohio), Greg Olsen (2002-03, Wayne Hills High School, N.J.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06 Highland Park High School, Texas), Harrison Smith (2006-07 Knoxville Catholic High School, Tenn.), Latavius Murray (2007-08, Onondaga High School, N.Y.), Brock Osweiler (2008-09, Flathead High School, Mont.) and Leonard Fournette (2014-15 & 2012-13, St. Augustine High School, La.).

The 5-foot-7, 165-pound senior wide receiver and defensive back caught 41 passes for 1,009 yards and eight touchdowns this past season, leading the Bulldawgs (10-2) to the Class 6A state semifinals. Baeza also rushed for 496 yards and six TDs, passed for 114 yards and two scores and returned two punts for touchdowns. Defensively, Baeza recorded 22 tackles and two interceptions. He was a First Team All-State selection as a wide receiver and cornerback in 2016.

A member of his local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Baeza has volunteered locally with the Special Olympics and as a youth football coach. "Brandon is such a tough player," said Aaron Ocampo, head coach of Centennial High. "He isn't very big but he is easily the toughest kid on the field. It doesn't matter that he's short—he still makes plays."

Baeza has maintained a 3.54 GPA in the classroom. He 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 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.

Baeza joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Football Players of the Year Josh Foley (2016-17, Rio Rancho High School), Gabe Ortega (2015-16, Sue Cleveland High School), Zach Gentry (2014-15, Eldorado High School), Bo Coleman (2013-14, Valley High School), Kamal Cass (2012-13, Clovis High School), Cole Gautsche (2011-12, Cleveland High School), Ryan Trujillo (2010-11, Manzano High School), and Ronnie Daniels (2009-10, La Cueva High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Baeza 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 <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.