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**GULFPORT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 6, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Ashton LeBlanc of Gulfport High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year. LeBlanc is the second Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Gulfport 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 LeBlanc as Mississippi's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, LeBlanc joins an elite alumni association of past state soccer award-winners, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook HS, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel HS, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, 2002-03, East Brunswick HS, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-04, Blue Valley West HS, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire HS, Mass.), Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista HS, Colo.).

The 6-foot, 165-pound junior defender led the Admirals to a 18-4-3 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. LeBlanc was the anchor of a defense that notched 12 shutouts and allowed just one goal in four postseason games. He was a First Team All-State selection and a Coast Coaches All-Star Team honoree.

A member of the Model United Nations at Gulfport High, LeBlanc has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach. "Ashton was a leader of our defense," said Henrik Madsen, head coach of Gulfport High. "He was the hardest-working player in every practice."

LeBlanc has maintained an A-minus average in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school this fall.

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.

LeBlanc joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Players of the Year Sumner Richardson (2016-17, Northwest Rankin High School), Ridge Brohaugh (2015-16 & 2013-14, Madison Central High School), Eli Troutman (2012-13, Ocean Springs High School), Jake Files (2011-12, Clinton High School), Derrick "Ducky" Troutman (2010-11, Ocean Springs High School), Jarred Arde (2009-10, Gulfport High School), Dillon Walker (2008-09, Pearl High School), Chris Williams (2007-08, Pearl High School), and Barry Prather (2006-07, Clinton High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, LeBlanc 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 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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