MARINER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE FLORIDA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 6, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Leo Perez of Mariner High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year.** Perez is the first Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Mariner 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 Perez as Florida'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, Perez joins an elite alumni association of past state soccer award-winners, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook High School, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel High School, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, 2002-03, East Brunswick High School, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-04, Blue Valley West High School, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire High School, Mass.) and Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.).

The 6-foot, 160-pound junior forward scored a school-record 47 goals and passed for 17 assists this past season, leading the Tritons (24-2-4) to the Class 3A state quarterfinals. The Class 3A Player of the Year, Perez recorded 13 multi-goal games, including seven hat tricks. An Allstate All-America selection, Perez was chosen to compete in July's Allstate Cup in Orlando. He was also the 2018 News-Press All-Area Player of the Year.

Perez has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach. "Despite everyone knowing who he is and what he can do, he still finds a way to get to the ball and that's when he's at his best," said Martin Cardenas, head coach of Mariner High. "Leo with the ball at his feet is unlike any other player I've coached in the last 26 years. He is glued to that ball and just does things that are not in the script."

Perez has maintained a weighted 3.90 GPA 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. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Perez joins recent Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Players of the Year Reed Davis (2017-18 & 2016-17, Fleming Island High School), Esteban Calvo (2015-16, Montverde Academy), Trey Langlois (2014-15, Bishop Kenny High School) and Diego Campos (2013-14, Montverde Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Perez also has the opportunity to award a $1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of his choosing. He is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve $10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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