

## **DALTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE GEORGIA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 6, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Omar Hernandez of Dalton High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Georgia Boys Soccer Player of the Year**. Now a two-time winner, Hernandez was the first Gatorade Georgia Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Dalton 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 Hernandez as Georgia'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, Hernandez 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-10, 142-pound senior midfielder led the Catamounts to a 23-0 record and the Class AAAAAA state championship this past season. Hernandez recorded 16 goals and 17 assists, setting up two of Dalton's tallies against Gainesville in a 4-1 win that captured the state title. The Catamounts finished the season ranked as the nation's No. 1 team both in the USA TODAY Super 25 and the Top Drawer Soccer FAB 50. A two-time First Team All-State selection and the Atlanta Constitution Journal Co-Player of the Year, he concluded his prep soccer career with 78 goals and 64 assists, both school records.

Hernandez has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach and works nights and weekends on the manufacturing line at a local carpet factory. "Omar is the most dangerous player I have ever had to game plan against," said Aaron Wessney, head coach of Sprayberry High. "His ability to use his left or right foot to strike the ball from distance, the power he has on his shot, his ability to shoot with very little space needed, his escapability from tight situations—I could go on and on."

Hernandez has maintained a weighted 3.30 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Wake Forest University 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.

Two-time winner Hernandez joins Gatorade Georgia Boys Soccer Players of the Year Jake Donaldson (2016-17, McIntosh High School), Josh Bronstorph (2015-16, Dunwoody High School), Steven Moore (2014-15, Houston County High School) and Adam Sheikali (2013-14, McIntosh High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Hernandez 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](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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