

**LINCOLN-WAY EAST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ILLINOIS FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (December 6, 2019) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation’s best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **A.J. Henning of Lincoln-Way East High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade Illinois Football Player of the Year**. Henning is the second Gatorade Illinois Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Lincoln-Way East 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 Henning as Illinois’ best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December, Henning joins an elite group of past state football award-winners, including Emmitt Smith (1986-87, Escambia High School, Fla.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06 Highland Park High School, Texas) and Christian McCaffrey (2012-13, 2013-14, Valor Christian High School, Colo.).

The 5-foot-11, 180-pound senior wide receiver and running back caught 52 passes for 815 yards and 13 touchdowns this past season, leading the Griffins (14-0) to the Class 8A state championship. Henning also rushed for 808 yards and 15 touchdowns on 120 carries and averaged 22.5 yards per punt return. The Chicago Sun-Times Player of the Year, he was selected to play in the 2020 All-American Bowl.

Henning has volunteered locally on behalf of youth football programs. “A.J. Henning may be the best high school player I’ve ever seen in person,” said Scott Peters, head coach at Carl Sandburg High School. “He’s a special athlete and he always plays hard, and he’s also incredibly humble.”

Henning has maintained a 3.16 GPA in the classroom. He has verbally committed to play football on scholarship at the University of Michigan next 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 and 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.

Henning joins recent Gatorade Illinois Football Players of the Year Jirehl Brock (2018-19, Quincy Senior High School), Samson Evans (2017-18, Prairie Ridge High School), Jake Marwede (2016-17, Loyola Academy), Sam Brodner (2015-16, Glenbard West High School) and Gabe Green (2014-15, Sacred Heart-Griffin High School), among the state’s list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade’s cause marketing platform “Play it Forward,” Henning 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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