

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW YORK FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 6, 2019) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Israel Abanikanda of Abraham Lincoln High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade New York Football Player of the Year**. Abanikanda is the second Gatorade New York Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Abraham Lincoln 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 Abanikanda as New York'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, Abanikanda 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 6-foot, 195-pound senior running back and defensive back rushed for 1,350 yards and 20 touchdowns on 136 carries this past season, leading the Railsplitters (7-5) to the Public School Athletic League semifinals. Abanikanda also caught 13 passes for 182 yards and three touchdowns, and averaged 36.3 yards per kickoff return. He made 30 tackles on defense and intercepted two passes. An All-City and All-State selection, he was named New York City Offensive Player of the Year as a junior.

Also a track and field standout, Abanikanda has volunteered locally on behalf of winter coat and food-donation drives for the needy, a soup kitchen and the U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots program. "Israel Abanikanda is a tough, strong runner with great balance, speed and acceleration," said Brian Ellis, head coach at Canarsie Educational Campus. "He doesn't go down on first contact, and once he breaks the first level, good luck catching him."

Abanikanda has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. He has verbally committed to play football on scholarship at the University of Pittsburgh 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.

Abanikanda joins recent Gatorade New York Football Players of the Year Trevor Yeboah-Kodie (2018-19, Garden City High School), Jeremy Ruckert (2017-18, Lindenhurst High School), Jack Coan (2016-17, Sayville High School), Jake Zembiec (2015-16, Aquinas Institute) and Jordan Fredericks (2014-15, Lawrence High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Abanikanda 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.