

**ROCKWALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE TEXAS 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 **Jaxon Smith-Njigba of Rockwall High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade Texas Football Player of the Year**. Smith-Njigba is the first Gatorade Texas Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Rockwall 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 Smith-Njigba as Texas' best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December, Smith-Njigba 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.).

At the time of his selection, the 6-foot-1, 195-pound senior wide receiver had led the Yellowjackets to an 11-2 record and a berth in the Class 6A-I regional finals. Smith-Njigba caught 93 passes for 1,876 yards and 30 touchdowns through 13 games and averaged 29.8 yards per punt return. A First Team All-State honoree and District 11 MVP, he has been selected to play in the 2020 All-American Bowl.

Smith-Njigba has volunteered locally on behalf of a food pantry, toy-donation drives and his church's youth ministry. "Jaxon is the very best we've seen," said Bob Wager, head coach at Martin High School. "Dynamic is an understatement. He's big, physical and explosive. He's got ridiculous body control and balance, and he plays hard all the time."

Smith-Njigba has maintained a 3.45 GPA in the classroom. He has verbally committed to play football on scholarship at The Ohio State University 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.

Smith-Njigba joins recent Gatorade Texas Football Players of the Year Chase Griffin (2018-19, Hutto High School), Spencer Sanders (2017-18, Ryan High School), Shawn Robinson (2016-17, DeSoto High School), Tren'Davian Dickson (2015-16, Navasota High School) and Kyler Murray (2014-15, Allen High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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