

**WADE HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 8, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Ben Erkens of Wade Hampton High School as its 2019-20 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Erkens is the first Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Wade Hampton 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 Erkens as South Carolina'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, Erkens joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, 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 (2004-05, 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-2, 183-pound senior forward and midfielder scored 12 goals and passed for two assists in seven games this spring before the remainder of the season was cancelled. The state's returning Gatorade Boys Soccer Player of the Year, Erkens is a First Team All-State honoree and concluded his prep career with 47 goals and 61 assists. A member of the South Region Olympic Development Program, he was named a Top Drawer Soccer First Team All-American.

A devoted member of his church community, Erkens has volunteered locally on behalf of youth sports camps and the U.S. Youth Soccer TOPSoccer program serving young athletes with disabilities. "Ben Erkens is, by far, the most dangerous player I've seen maybe in the last several years," said Troy Alexander, head coach at Hartsville High School. "He has good size, great speed and fantastic vision. He's a great player, and he also respects the game."

Erkens has maintained a 3.82 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Clemson University.

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. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Two-time winner Erkens joins recent Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Players of the Year Charlie Marino (2017-18, Wando High School), Wyatt Millard (2016-17, Cardinal Newman High School), Marcelo Malpartida (2015-16, River Bluff High School), Michele Bottari (2014-15, J.L. Mann), and Tyler Rider (2013-14, J.L. Mann Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

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).