

**AMERICAN HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE FLORIDA FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 13, 2021) — In its 36<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced James Williams of American Heritage High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Florida Football Player of the Year. Williams is the second Gatorade Florida Football Player of the Year to be chosen from American Heritage 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 Williams as Florida's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Williams 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-5, 220-pound senior safety led the Patriots to an 11-2 record and the Class 5A state championship this past season. Williams recorded 74 tackles, seven tackles for loss and two interceptions, while recovering four fumbles and forcing two. He returned both an interception and a blocked kick for touchdowns. Ranked as the nation's No. 13 recruit in the Class of 2021 by 247Sports.com, Williams was a MaxPreps First Team All-American and a finalist for the All-American Bowl adidas Player of the Year.

Williams has volunteered locally on behalf of Christmas toy drives and youth football programs. "James Williams is by far the best player we faced this year, possibly the best player I've seen in high school football," said John Peacock, head coach at Venice High School. "He can cover like a 5-11, 160-pound cornerback, but he's physical like a 245-pound linebacker. He's just a complete stud on the football field."

Williams has maintained a 3.38 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at the University of Miami 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. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which works with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Williams joins recent Gatorade Florida Football Players of the Year Derek Wingo (2019-20, St. Thomas Aquinas High School), Marcus Crowley (2018-19, Trinity Christian Academy), Lorenzo Lingard (2017-18, University High School), and Shaun Wade (2016-17, Trinity Christian Academy), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Williams has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Williams is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization they chose is deserving of one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants, which will be announced throughout the year. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$2.7 million across 1,117 organizations.

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 [playeroftheyear.gatorade.com](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com), on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/Gatorade](https://twitter.com/Gatorade).

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