

**ST. THOMAS MORE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE LOUISIANA FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 13, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Walker Howard of St. Thomas More High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Louisiana Football Player of the Year. Howard is the first Gatorade Louisiana Football Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Thomas More 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 Howard as Louisiana'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, Howard 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-1, 185-pound junior quarterback led the Cougars to a 10-0 record and the Division II state championship this past season. Howard threw for 3,430 yards and 39 touchdowns, including 381 yards and four scores in St. Thomas More's 35-28 win over De La Salle High in the state final. The 2020 MaxPreps State Player of the Year, Howard was selected as the Louisiana Sports Writers Association's Class 4A Outstanding Offensive Player. He is ranked as the nation's No. 28 recruit in the Class of 2022 by ESPN.com.

Howard has volunteered locally as a youth football coach. "Walker was special," said Ryan Antoine, head coach of Westgate High. "He is a true quarterback. He can do it all—run, throw, he's accurate, he can read a defense and he's savvy. He had a huge impact on their success."

Howard has maintained a B average in the classroom. He has made a verbal commitment to play football on scholarship at Louisiana State University beginning in the fall of 2022.

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.

Howard joins recent Gatorade Louisiana Football Players of the Year Christian Westcott (2019-20, Lakeshore High School), Derek Stingley Jr. (2018-19, Dunham School), Slade Bolden (2017-18, West Monroe High School), and Keytaon Thompson (2016-17, Landry-Walker High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Howard has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Howard 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, on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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