

**DE SMET JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 Mekhi Wingo of De Smet Jesuit High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Missouri Football Player of the Year. Wingo is the first Gatorade Missouri Football Player of the Year to be chosen from De Smet Jesuit 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 Wingo as Missouri'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, Wingo 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, 275-pound senior defensive tackle recorded 54 tackles, 16 tackles for loss and five sacks this past season, leading the Spartans (6-1) to the Class 6 state championship game. The two-time Class 6 Defensive Player of the year, Wingo is also a First Team All-State honoree and the Metro Catholic Conference Defensive Player of the Year.

Wingo has volunteered on behalf of a local preschool. "I know this isn't fair to the kid, but Mekhi Wingo is the high school version of (Los Angeles Rams seven-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle) Aaron Donald," said Mike Jones, head coach at St. Louis University High. "He's just an outstanding defensive tackle. He's explosive off the ball and constantly plays in the backfield of the offense."

Wingo has maintained a 3.89 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at the University of Missouri 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.

Wingo joins recent Gatorade Missouri Football Players of the Year Isaiah Davis (2019-20, Joplin High School), Isaiah Williams (2018-19 & 2017-18, Trinity Catholic High School), and Alex Huston (2016-17, Glendale High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Wingo has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Wingo 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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