

**SALISBURY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Jalon Walker of Salisbury High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade North Carolina Football Player of the Year. Walker is the first Gatorade North Carolina Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Salisbury 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 Walker as North Carolina'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, Walker 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-2, 220-pound junior linebacker led the Hornets (9-2) to the Class 2AA state championship this past season. Walker recorded 97 tackles, 19 tackles for loss, eight sacks and two fumble recoveries. He notched 12 tackles and caught a touchdown pass in the state title game. A three-time All-Conference and All-County selection, Walker was also the Central Carolina Conference Defensive Player of the Year.

A devoted member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Walker has volunteered locally on behalf of community clean-up initiatives and youth empowerment programs. "Jalon Walker is a super athlete who is always around the ball," said Mark Holcomb, head coach at Oak Grove High. "He has a great combination of speed, strength and football knowledge, and he's versatile enough to play on the line or at linebacker or cover receivers. One of the most well-rounded athletes I've ever coached against."

Walker has maintained a 4.03 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school 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.

Walker joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Football Players of the Year Will Shipley (2019-20, Weddington High School), Sam Howell (2018-19, Sun Valley High School), Quavaris Crouch (2017-18, Harding University High School), and Zamir White (2016-17, Scotland High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Walker has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Walker 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 [www.playeroftheyear.gatorade.com](http://www.playeroftheyear.gatorade.com), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](https://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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