

**LAS CRUCES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 4, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced William "Deuce" Benjamin of Las Cruces High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade New Mexico Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Benjamin is the third Gatorade New Mexico Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Las Cruces 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 Benjamin as New Mexico's best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Benjamin joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Jayson Tatum (2015-16, Chaminade College Preparatory School, Mo.), Karl-Anthony Towns (2012-13 & 2013-14, St. Joseph High School, N.J.), Jabari Parker (2011-12, Simeon Career Academy, Ill.) and Dwight Howard (2003-04, Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.).

The 6-foot-1 junior guard led the Bulldogs to a 14-1 record and the Class 5A state final this past season, averaging 27.1 points, 5.7 rebounds, 5.5 assists and 3 steals per game. The 2020-21 MaxPreps New Mexico High School Boys Basketball Player of the Year, Benjamin is also a two-time New Mexico High School Coaches Association First-Team All-State selection. After leading Las Cruces to a 28-3 record and the Class 5A state championship in 2020, Benjamin followed that up with a state runner-up campaign in which he scored at least 30 points six times.

Benjamin has volunteered locally teaching and tutoring young people at the "I Do Love Math" summer camp. "We tried to double-team Deuce, and he ate us up in both games we played," said Juan Gonzalez, head coach at Mayfield High. "He's improved since last year as a sophomore. I normally wouldn't talk so highly of a player since I'm a defensive coach and we have a couple of defensive specialists who were tough against anybody. But it didn't seem to faze him. I respect his work ethic and he's hungry to get better. He stands out."

Benjamin has maintained a B average 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.

Benjamin joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Boys Basketball Players of the Year Joziah Ramos (2019-20, Atrisco Heritage Academy High School), David Patterson (2018-19, Rio Rancho High School), Anthony Chavez (2017-18, Valley High School), and Brenden Boatwright (2016-17, Carlsbad High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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