

**TAMPA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE FLORIDA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 11, 2021) — In its 36<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Marcello Valbuena of Tampa Catholic High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Valbuena is the first Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Tampa Catholic 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 Valbuena as Florida's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Valbuena joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook High School, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel High School, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02 & 2002-03, East Brunswick High School, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-05, Blue Valley West High School, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire High School, Mass.) and Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.).

The 6-foot-1, 175-pound senior forward led the Crusaders to a 25-2 record and the Class 3A state championship this past season. Valbuena scored 36 goals and passed for five assists, and he recorded two goals each in the state quarterfinals, semifinals and title game. In his only season of high school soccer, Valbuena was named the Florida Dairy Farmers Mr. Soccer winner.

Valbuena has traveled to Costa Rica with a Global Leadership soccer program, where he built soccer fields and helped refurbish recreational playgrounds. He has also volunteered locally at a food bank and homeless shelter, in addition to donating his time by collecting sporting equipment for underprivileged youth. "Marcello had a huge impact on Tampa Catholic's state championship run," said Tim Cooper, head coach of Berkeley Prep. "He is a big, strong, physical forward who can hold the ball up, but also has the speed and skill to dribble past defenders."

Valbuena has maintained a weighted 3.33 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at the University of Tampa 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.

Valbuena joins recent Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Players of the Year Santa Ihara (2019-20, Montverde Academy), Leo Perez (2018-19, Mariner High School), and Reed Davis (2017-18 & 2016-17, Fleming Island High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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