

**WAUKEE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE IOWA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 11, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced CJ Coppola of Waukee High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Iowa Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Coppola is the first Gatorade Iowa Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Waukee 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 Coppola as Iowa'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, Coppola 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-2, 175-pound junior forward scored 23 goals and passed for four assists this past season, leading the Warriors (18-1) to the Class 3A Substate championship game. Coppola recorded seven multi-goal games, including four hat tricks. A First Team All-Conference selection, he scored the game-winning goal as a freshman in the state championship match and has scored 34 goals in 33 games in his prep soccer career.

Coppola has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach, and he has donated his time to multiple community service initiatives through his church. "CJ is so good in open space," said Carlos Acebey, head coach of Waukee High. "Not only is he very difficult to defend due to his size and speed, but he also possesses such quick feet and technical skill with the ball that the best a defender can do, usually, is hope the keeper saves the shot or CJ misses the frame entirely."

Coppola has maintained a 3.69 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.

Coppola joins recent Gatorade Iowa Boys Soccer Players of the Year Alan Kim (2019-20, Kennedy High School), Roderick Orellana-Lemus (2018-19, Lincoln High School), Jordy Triana-Vasquez (2017-18, Valley High School), and Jack Dunn (2016-17, Bettendorf High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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