

**GULL LAKE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MICHIGAN 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 Roni Sylejmani of Gull Lake High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Michigan Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Sylejmani is the first Gatorade Michigan Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Gull Lake 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 Sylejmani as Michigan'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, Sylejmani 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, 170-pound senior midfielder and forward led the Blue Devils to a 16-2-1 record and the Division II state championship this past season. Sylejmani scored 22 goals and passed for 17 assists, netting the lone goal in Gull Lake's 1-0 overtime win over DeWitt High in the state title game. A Michigan High School Soccer Coaches Association Dream Team selection, he was a 2020 United Soccer Coaches High School All-American honoree. He concluded his prep soccer career with 65 goals and 35 assists.

Sylejmani has volunteered locally with a food bank and homeless shelter as well as the Salvation Army. He has also donated his time to the Special Olympics and as a youth soccer coach. "Roni has so many ways he can beat you," said John Brown, head coach of St. Joseph High. "Roni is present from the opening whistle. I never want to see him over the ball for a free kick because it's going to be on frame with pace."

Sylejmani has maintained a B average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Western Michigan University 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.

Sylejmani joins recent Gatorade Michigan Boys Soccer Players of the Year Aidan O'Connor (2019-20 & 2018-19, Forest Hills Northern High School), Ryan Pierson (2017-18, Detroit Catholic Central High School), and Dalton Michael (2016-17, Traverse City West Senior High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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