

**JACKSON ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI 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 Emery Thigpen of Jackson Academy as its 2020-21 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Thigpen is the second Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Jackson Academy.

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 Thigpen as Mississippi'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, Thigpen 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, 165-pound senior midfielder scored 14 goals and passed for 18 assists this past season, leading the Raiders (18-4-1) to the Midsouth Association of Independent Schools championship. Thigpen is a First Team All-MAIS selection and a three-time All-Tournament honoree.

Also a track standout, he has volunteered locally on behalf of his church's youth group and his school's environmental activism club. "Emery Thigpen is a special player," said John Kehoe, head coach at Madison-Ridgeland Academy. "He does everything on the field—he attacks, he defends, he scores goals. He was a massive part of that team's success."

Thigpen has maintained a weighted 4.23 GPA in the classroom. He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Thigpen joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Boys Soccer Players of the Year Heath Flathau (2019-20, Sacred Heart Catholic School), Ashton LeBlanc (2018-19 & 2017-18, Gulfport High School), and Sumner Richardson (2016-17, Northwest Rankin High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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