

**FAIRMONT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 Jonas Branch of Fairmont Senior High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade West Virginia Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Branch is the first Gatorade West Virginia Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Fairmont Senior 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 Branch as West Virginia'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, Branch 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 5-foot-10, 155-pound senior midfielder scored 30 goals and passed for 32 assists this past season, leading the Polar Bears (19-3) to the Class A-AA state championship. A United Soccer Coaches All-Region selection, Branch was named Class A-AA Player of the Year by both the West Virginia Sports Writers Association and the West Virginia High School Soccer Coaches Association. He concluded his prep career with 78 goals and 79 assists.

A member of the National Honor Society, Branch has volunteered locally on behalf of youth soccer programs. "In terms of pure soccer, there's no player at any level who had a bigger impact on games than Jonas Branch," said Niall Paul, head coach at Charleston Catholic High. "His defensive work rate and positioning are game changing, but even more impressive is his remarkable ability to create an offensive threat and opportunities out of thin air."

Branch has maintained a 3.79 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer at West Virginia Wesleyan College 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.

Branch joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Boys Soccer Players of the Year Khori Miles (2019-20, Robert C. Byrd High School), Joseph Biafora (2018-19, University High School), and Seth Jordan (2017-18 & 2016-17, Nitro High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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