

**SOUTHEAST VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE IOWA FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (December 7, 2021) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Aaron Graves of Southeast Valley High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Iowa Football Player of the Year**. Graves is the first Gatorade Iowa Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Southeast Valley 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 Graves as Iowa's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in December, Graves joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners, including Emmitt Smith (1986-87, Escambia High School, Fla.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas) and Christian McCaffrey (2012-13 & 2013-14, Valor Christian High School, Colo.).

The 6-foot-5, 270-pound senior defensive tackle and offensive guard recorded 63 tackles, 14 tackles for a loss and 7.5 sacks this past season, leading the Jaguars to the Class 2A state championship. Graves also averaged 38.0 yards per punt and helped block for an offense that scored 38.6 points per game. A three-time First Team All-State selection, he was also named District Defensive MVP twice.

Graves has volunteered locally on behalf of youth summer camps, Meals on Wheels and food-donation drives. "Aaron Graves is one of the best players I've ever seen come out of Iowa," said Ryan Rezac, head coach at Estherville Lincoln High School. "He's just a dominant force on both sides of the ball. He's almost a three-gap player on the defensive line; he made it nearly impossible to run anything inside."

Graves has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at the University of Iowa next 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 leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Graves joins recent Gatorade Iowa Football Players of the Year Cooper DeJean (2020-21, OABCIG High School), Hunter Dekkers (2019-20, West Sioux High School), Max Duggan (2018-19, Lewis Central High School), and Evan Flitz (2017-18, Iowa City West High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Gatorade has a long-standing history of serving athlete communities and understands how sports instill valuable lifelong skills on and off the field. Through Gatorade's "Play it Forward" platform, Graves has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national organization of their choosing that helps young athletes realize the benefits of playing sports. Graves is also eligible to submit a short 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 \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 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) or follow us on social media on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY), Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade) and Twitter at [twitter.com/Gatorade](https://twitter.com/Gatorade).