

**TRAVERSE CITY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MICHIGAN FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (December 7, 2021) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Josh Burnham of Traverse City Central High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Michigan Football Player of the Year**. Burnham is the first Gatorade Michigan Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Traverse City Central 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 Burnham as Michigan'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, Burnham 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-4, 225-pound senior linebacker and quarterback rushed for 1,516 yards and 29 touchdowns on 200 carries this past season, leading the Trojans (11-2) to the Division 2 state championship game. Burnham completed 49 of 98 passes for 955 yards and 14 touchdowns, also recording 102 tackles, 12 tackles for a loss and two interceptions on defense. A member of the Michigan High School Football Coaches Dream Team, he has been selected to play in the 2022 All-American Bowl and is a finalist for the Butkus Award, given to the nation's top high school linebacker.

Burnham has served as a mentor for special needs students and has volunteered locally on behalf of Freedom Builders, which seeks to create affordable housing, and youth sports camps. "Burnham was the best player I saw all year," said Derek Pennington, head coach at Caledonia High School. "He was unstoppable, honestly. He's just very strong and powerful, a man playing versus boys. He was super impressive on both sides of the ball."

Burnham has maintained a 3.32 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at the University of Notre Dame 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.

Burnham joins recent Gatorade Michigan Football Players of the Year Donovan Edwards (2020-21, West Bloomfield High School), Cameron Martinez (2019-20, Muskegon High School), Dequan Finn (2018-19, Martin Luther King High School), and La'Darius Jefferson (2017-18, Muskegon 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, Burnham 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. Burnham 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 or follow us on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY, Instagram at instagram.com/Gatorade and Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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