

**GREENVILLE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI 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 **D.J. Smith Jr. of Greenville Christian School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Mississippi Football Player of the Year**. Smith is the first Gatorade Mississippi Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Greenville Christian 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 Smith as Mississippi'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, Smith 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-2, 210-pound senior quarterback led the Saints to a 10-1 record and a second-straight Mississippi Association of Independent Schools Class 3A state championship this past season. Smith passed for 2,642 yards and 37 touchdowns while also picking up 935 yards and 14 scores on the ground. A transfer from Greenwood High before his junior year, Smith concluded his prep football career with 12,323 yards of total offense and 159 touchdowns.

A class representative on the Greenville Christian High Student Council, Smith has volunteered locally as an elementary school mentor, and he has donated his time as part of multiple community service initiatives through his church. "D.J. is ahead of his time in high school football," said Travis Upshaw, head coach of Delta Streets Academy. "He already has the talent and leadership to step on any field at the next level of play. His impact on the Saints is historic and will be hard to duplicate."

Smith has maintained a 3.50 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 leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Smith joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Football Players of the Year Ty Keyes (2020-21 & 2019-20, Taylorsville High School), Nakobe Dean (2018-19, Horn Lake High School), and Tony Brown (2017-18, East Central 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, Smith 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. Smith 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).