

**BILLINGS WEST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MONTANA 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 **Taco Dowler of Billings West High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Montana Football Player of the Year**. Dowler is the seventh Gatorade Montana Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Billings West 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 Dowler as Montana'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, Dowler 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 5-foot-9, 175-pound senior wide receiver and defensive back caught 59 passes for 943 yards and nine touchdowns this past season, leading the Golden Bears (10-2) to the Class AA state championship game. Dowler also rushed six times for 61 yards, and recorded 22 tackles and two interceptions on defense. A three-time All-State selection at wide receiver, he was a two-time All-State pick at defensive back, kick returner and punt returner as well.

A standout on the track oval, Dowler has volunteered by assisting special needs students in his school. "Taco Dowler is a game-changer," said Kyle Mihelish, head coach at Capital High School. "They give him the ball in a lot of different situations and he can score from anywhere. He's a tremendous player who you have to double-cover all the time."

Dowler has maintained a 3.50 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at Montana State University 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.

Dowler joins recent Gatorade Montana Football Players of the Year Dylan Rollins (2020-21, Sentinel High School), Tommy Mellott (2019-20, Butte High School), Carson Rostad (2018-19, Hamilton High School), and Gabe Sulser (2017-18, Billings Senior 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, Dowler 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. Dowler 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.