

**LIBERTY CHRISTIAN ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE VIRGINIA 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 **Zach Rice of Liberty Christian Academy** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Virginia Football Player of the Year**. Rice is the first Gatorade Virginia Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Liberty Christian Academy.

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 Rice as Virginia'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, Rice 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-6, 300-pound senior offensive and defensive tackle had led the Bulldogs to a 12-0 record and a berth in the Class 3 semifinals at the time of his selection. Rice recorded 145 pancake blocks through 12 games, opening holes for an attack that is averaging 47.7 points and 216 yards rushing per game. He also contributed 35 tackles—four for a loss—and two sacks defensively. A two-time All-State honoree, Rice has been selected to play in the 2022 All-American Bowl. He is ranked as the nation's No. 13 recruit in the Class of 2022 by ESPN.

A devoted member of his church community, Rice has served as a mentor for younger students and has volunteered locally on behalf of youth football camps. "I've been coaching for 20 years and Zach Rice is the best player I've ever seen," said Joe Favero, head coach at Magna Vista High School. "He is dominant on every play."

Rice has maintained a 3.13 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play football on scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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.

Rice joins recent Gatorade Virginia Football Players of the Year Kelvin Gilliam (2020-21, Highland Springs High School), TreVeyon Henderson (2019-20, Hopewell High School), Brandon Smith (2018-19, Louisa County High School), and Ricky Slade (2017-18, C.D. Hylton 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, Rice 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. Rice 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.

###