

**NEW HANOVER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 16, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Aidan Payne** of **New Hanover High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year**. Payne is the second Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from New Hanover 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 Payne as North Carolina's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Payne joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook High School, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel High School, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02 & 2002-03, East Brunswick High School, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-05, Blue Valley West High School, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire High School, Mass.) and Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.).

The 6-foot-3, 165-pound senior forward led the Wildcats to a 27-0-1 record and the Class 4A state championship this past season. Payne tallied 54 goals and 11 assists, including two goals and an assist in New Hanover's 3-0 win over Hough High in the state title game. He also scored all four goals in his team's 4-2 victory over Cardinal Gibbons High in the state semifinals. The North Carolina Soccer Coaches Association Player of the Year, he is also a United Soccer Coaches All-American selection.

Payne has volunteered locally with his school's Beta Club, and he has donated his time at a local adult day care service. "Aidan was, in a word, phenomenal," said David Smith, head coach of Hough High School. "To me, he was a true striker in every sense of the word. When he got the ball, I worried he was going to make something happen."

Payne has maintained a weighted 4.48 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at North Carolina State University this 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.

Payne joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Players of the Year Carter Hensley (2020-21, Myers Park High School), Landon Sloan (2019-20, Heritage High School), Cannon Tootle (2018-19, Swansboro High School), and Izaiah Vignali (2017-18, A.C. Reynolds 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, Payne 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. Payne 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).

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