

**J.L. MANN ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 12, 2025) — In its 40th year of honoring the nation’s most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Smith Darby** of **J.L. Mann Academy** is the **2024-25 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year**.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes for their success on the field, in the classroom and in the community. The award distinguishes Darby as South Carolina’s best high school boys soccer player, and he joins an impressive group of alumni that spans CEOs, coaches and star athletes such as Ben Bender (2019-20, Calvert Hall College High School, M.D.) and Ransford Gyan (2022-23 & 2023-24, St. Benedict’s Preparatory School, N.J.).

The 6-foot-4, 185-pound junior forward led the Patriots to a 25-0 record and the Class 5A, Division 1 state championship this past season. Darby scored 32 goals and passed for 12 assists, including one of each in J.L. Mann Academy’s 5-3 win over Ashley Ridge High School in the state final. A two-time Class 5A First Team All-State selection, he was the 2025 Region X-5A Player of the Year. He concluded his junior year with 63 goals and 26 assists in his prep soccer career.

A three-year member of the J.L. Mann Academy student council, Darby is an active member of his church’s youth ministry program. He has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach. “Smith is a fantastic player,” said Jimmy George, head coach of T.L. Hanna High School. “The way he puts himself into positions to score is like no other. If given a chance, he will punish you every time with his pinpoint ability to finish.”

Darby has maintained a weighted 3.73 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states across 12 different high school sports – 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.

As part of Gatorade’s commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$5.6 million in grants to winners across more than 2,000 organizations.

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 Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at x.com/Gatorade.

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