

**TAFT SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 8, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Sammed Bawa of Taft School as its 2019-20 Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Bawa is the first Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Taft 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 Bawa as Connecticut'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, Bawa 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 5-foot-9, 160-pound senior midfielder tallied 21 goals and five assists this past season, leading the Rhinos (16-2-1) to the New England Prep School Athletic Council Class A tournament semifinals. The New England Prep Soccer Journal Midfielder of the Year, Bawa participated in the High School All-American Game last December and was ranked as the nation's No. 143 recruit in the Class of 2020 by TopDrawerSoccer.com. He concluded his prep soccer career with 72 goals and 35 assists.

A graduate of the Right to Dream Academy in Ghana, Bawa organized a soccer tournament in his neighborhood back home that raised more than \$6,000 for the needy. He has volunteered locally as a youth soccer coach. "Bawa is a freak—just an absurdly talented player," said Charlie Bour, head coach of the Berkshire School. "He is so athletic and so dominant."

Bawa has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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 work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Bawa joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Boys Soccer Players of the Year Michael Suski (2018-19 & 2017-18, Loomis Chaffee School), Umar Farouk Osman (2016-17, The Hotchkiss School), Ema Twumasi (2015-16, Kent School), Mickey Watson (2014-15, South Kent School), and Matheus Souza (2013-14, Conrad High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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 www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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