

**MONTVERDE ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE FLORIDA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 8, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Santa Ihara of Montverde Academy as its 2019-20 Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Ihara is the fourth Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Montverde 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 Ihara as Florida'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, Ihara 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, 145-pound senior defensive center midfielder scored six goals and passed for 10 assists this past season, leading the Eagles to a 17-1-1 record. A four-year starter for Montverde, Ihara was on the losing end of a result only twice in his career with the Eagles. Also a long-time member of the Orlando City Development Academy team, he was the 2019-20 Montverde Academy Athlete of the Year.

Ihara has volunteered locally with Central Florida Dreamplex, an organization that services children with special needs. "Santa Ihara is probably the best holding midfielder in the entire state," said Raul Jara, head coach of Lake Nona High. "He is very composed on the ball and controls the tempo of the game single-handedly with his style of play. He works extremely hard on both sides of the ball, offensively and defensively."

Ihara has maintained a 3.87 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Duke University.

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.

Ihara joins recent Gatorade Florida Boys Soccer Players of the Year Leo Perez (2018-19, Mariner High School), Reed Davis (2017-18 & 2016-17, Fleming Island High School), Esteban Calvo (2015-16, Montverde Academy), Trey Langlois (2014-15, Bishop Kenny High School), and Diego Campos (2013-14, Montverde Academy) 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](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](https://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

###