

**SOUTHEAST POLK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE IOWA FOOTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 6, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Abu Sama** of **Southeast Polk High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Iowa Football Player of the Year**. Sama is the first Gatorade Iowa Football Player of the Year to be chosen from Southeast Polk 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 Sama as Iowa's best high school football player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Sama joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Trevor Lawrence (2018-19 & 2016-17, Cartersville High School, Ga.), Matthew Stafford (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas) and Emmitt Smith (1986-87, Escambia High School, Fla.).

The 5-foot-10, 196-pound senior running back led the Rams to a 12-1 record and the Class 5A state championship this past season. Sama rushed for 1,408 yards and 28 touchdowns on 144 carries, averaging 9.8 yards per attempt, and caught nine passes for 144 yards and a touchdown. He also played defensive back, recording 29 tackles. In Southeast Polk High School's 49-14 win over Valley High School in the 5A state championship game, Sama exploded for 372 yards and six touchdowns on the ground, both state title-game records.

Sama has volunteered locally with the Genesis Youth Foundation, a non-profit organization that helps immigrant families in the Des Moines area. He also has donated his time organizing weekly workouts for at-risk Des Moines youth who express an interest in sports. "Abu Sama can dominate a game like no other player in the state," Valley High School head coach Gary Swenson said of Sama. "I have always contended one player can't beat you in a football game, but he can get as close as any individual I've seen for a while."

Sama has maintained a B average in the classroom. At the time of his selection, he'd made a verbal commitment to play football on scholarship at Iowa 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.

Sama joins recent Gatorade Iowa Football Players of the Year Aaron Graves (2021-22, Southeast Valley High School), Cooper DeJean (2020-21, OABCIG High School), Hunter Dekkers (2019-20, West Sioux High School), and Max Duggan (2018-19, Lewis Central High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Being a Gatorade Player of the Year means paying it forward for the next generation. Through Gatorade's Play it Forward initiative, every Player of the Year receives a grant to give to one of Gatorade's social impact partners, supporting Gatorade's ambition to fuel the future of sport. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 organizations.

For nearly 40 years, Gatorade has honored high school athletes at the top of their game as teammates, supporting their communities and achieving academic success. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes and community leaders, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport.

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

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