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Jake Luton of Oregon State University, Drew Wilson of Georgia Southern University and Octavion Wilson of Salisbury University Named 2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners

Student-athletes will be honored during an on-field ceremony at the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the PlayStation® Fiesta Bowl and \$30,000 will be donated to general scholarship funds on behalf of all honorees.

ROCHESTER, Minn.—The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), in association with The Associated Press (AP) and the Fiesta Bowl Organization, have selected three college football student-athletes—**Jake Luton of Oregon State University, Drew Wilson of Georgia Southern University and Octavion Wilson of Salisbury University**—as the winners of the **2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award**. The three student-athletes, who are being recognized for overcoming injury or illness, will be honored during an on-field ceremony at the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the PlayStation® Fiesta Bowl at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz., on December 28, 2019.

Drew Wilson was selected in a vote of AP College Football Poll Voters while Octavion Wilson was chosen by a vote of the CoSIDA small-college advisory board. Luton, along with six student-athletes named Honorable Mention, was selected by a vote of AP, CoSIDA, the Fiesta Bowl organization and the editors of *Touchdown Illustrated*, college football's gameday publication.

A total of \$30,000 will be donated in the names of the honorees to their school's general scholarship fund, with \$15,000 being awarded in the names of the three winners and \$15,000 on behalf of the six named honorable mention: **Shaun Crawford** (DB, University of Notre Dame); **Alex Martinez** (QB, Saint Xavier University); **Josh Paschal** (DL, University of Kentucky); **Hunter Spriggs** (OL, Chapman University); **Isaiah Weston** (WR, University of Northern Iowa); and **Antoine Winfield Jr.** (DB, University of Minnesota).

“We commend Jake, Drew, Octavion and all of the inspiring student-athletes we recognized this season for sharing their personal stories of overcoming adversity to help fans better appreciate the

roads these young men have traveled,” says Doug Vance, executive director of CoSIDA. “We hope these stories of achievement can inspire other people to meet the challenges in their own lives.”

“We understand how challenging it can be for student-athletes to return from injury or illness,” says Dr. Michael Stuart, co-director, Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine. “The 30 student-athletes we recognized this year are representative of the motivation, determination and perseverance that student-athletes all across America demonstrate on a daily basis.”

Here’s a look at the football student-athletes chosen as **2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners** and the six young men recognized as Honorable Mention. For details on all 30 nominees, visit www.Comeback-Player.com and follow on social media at @ComebackPlayrFB and #MayoClinicCPOY.

Jake Luton, a quarterback for Oregon State University, was carted off the field on a stretcher after suffering a thoracic spine fracture in week four of the 2017 season versus Washington State. The Marysville, Wash., native returned in 2018 but was limited to just five starts after suffering an ankle injury in week one. The team captain’s remarkable comeback was completed this season, leading the Beavers to a 5-6 record in his 11 starts by completing 222 of 358 passes (62 percent) for 2,714 yards, 28 TDs and just three interceptions. He joins Justin Fields and Tua Tagovailoa as the only quarterbacks to throw 25 touchdown passes with three or fewer interceptions. He ranks seventh in career passing yards at OSU with 5,227 and fifth with 42 career touchdown passes. His 28 touchdown passes this season were the third best ever for an OSU quarterback. The sixth-year senior has a 3.43 GPA, and degrees in sociology and innovation management.

Drew Wilson, an offensive lineman for Georgia Southern University, missed the entire 2018 season, suffering a detached retina in his right eye. What was initially thought to be the onset of pre-diabetes due to its rapid escalation was determined by specialists in Charleston to be a detached retina, which then required four surgeries to repair. Due to sensitivity to light following the surgeries, the 6-foot-4, 310-pound Bamburg, S.C., native was forced to take the fall semester off. Unable to study or work out, he started to think about his future without football. But following his final surgery, he was convinced that the risks of playing were minimal. As a result of surgeries, Drew is legally blind in the eye. The redshirt junior regained his starting position at right tackle this season and helped the high-powered Eagles offense average 29.17 points, and 333.7 yards per game. With a 7-5 record in the Sun Belt Conference, the Eagles will take on Liberty University in the Cure Bowl in Orlando.

Octavion Wilson, a senior wide receiver for Salisbury University, played his first two seasons of college football for Division III powerhouse Mount Union. Following a promising freshman season, in which he recorded 11 receptions and five touchdowns, he was diagnosed with pericarditis—an inflammation of the lining around the heart. While training for a comeback in 2017, the Lincoln, Del., native was diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy—a neuromuscular disease resulting from damage to the nerves outside of the brain and spinal cord. The two years of serious illness, coupled with the inability to play football, led the young man to attempt to take his life several times. But, in January 2018, with both his physical and mental states improved, he dedicated himself to family, friends and faith. He transferred closer to home to earn his degree in

Engineering Physics and play football for Salisbury University, a Division III school in the New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC). Despite the Sea Gulls being primarily a running team, Wilson led the team with 23 receptions, 393 yards and three touchdowns. His 17.3 yards per catch was good for second in the NJAC. He also set the school's single game record with 182 yards receiving versus The College of New Jersey.

The six, football student-athletes recognized as **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award *Honorable Mention*** are:

Shaun Crawford, a defensive back for the University of Notre Dame, had his season cut short due to injuries that required surgery for three of the past four seasons—a pair of torn ACLs and an Achilles injury. Through the first four games this year, he was once again a vital contributor for the Irish defensive backfield before suffering a dislocated elbow on Sept. 29 versus Virginia. Initially thought to be season-ending, remarkably the Lakewood, Ohio, native missed just two games before returning on Nov. 2 versus Virginia Tech.

Alex Martinez, the starting quarterback at Saint Xavier University of the NAIA Mid-States Football Association (MSFA), was off to a strong start in 2018, before suffering a torn ACL in the fifth game of the season. Following surgery and an off-season of grueling physical therapy, the Burbank, Ill., native was back under center for the start of the 2019 season. He was better than ever, earning MSFA Midwest League Offensive Player of the Year honors.

Josh Paschal, a sophomore defensive lineman for the University of Kentucky, missed most of the 2018 season when, in July, a dot on his left foot was diagnosed as malignant melanoma. After undergoing three surgeries and ongoing monthly immunotherapy treatments, the Prince George's County, Md., native returned on a limited basis for the team's final three games. He opened this season as a starter on the defensive line and made his presence felt immediately. On the season, he recorded 27 tackles, 6.5 TFL, 3.5 sacks, two forced fumbles and a blocked kick.

Hunter Spriggs, an offensive lineman for Chapman University, a Division III school in the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC), returned to the field at right tackle on Oct. 19 versus Occidental College after a two-year absence. The senior business administration major from El Dorado Hills, Calif., was diagnosed with leukemia in July 2017 and despite treating it with oral chemotherapy, the cancer returned in May 2018 as acute lymphoblastic leukemia and a second aggressive type, chronic myeloid leukemia. He underwent a bone marrow transplant and more chemotherapy that summer and just two weeks after his chest port was taken out, he was back in the weight room. He took about 50 pills a day, a combination of immunosuppressant drugs, and wore a mask to protect against bacteria. Spriggs returned to school for the 2019 spring semester and immediately rejoined the team.

Isaiah Weston, a wide receiver for the University of Northern Iowa, missed last season after suffering a season-ending ACL injury on the first week of fall camp. The native of St. Michael-Albertville, Minn., bounced back even better this year, earning All-MVC First Team honors with 41 receptions, 1,040 yards, 10 TDs and a conference-leading 25.3 yards per catch.

Antoine Winfield Jr., a University of Minnesota cornerback, is a rare fourth-year sophomore

due to back-to-back season-ending injuries after just four games—a hamstring in 2017 and foot in 2018. In the Gophers historic win over No. 4 Penn State, the native of The Woodlands, Texas, intercepted two passes and had 11 tackles. He earned All-Big Ten First Team Honors and was selected the top defensive back in the conference. His eye-popping statistics included 80 tackles, 3.5 TFL, three sacks, two forced fumbles and seven interceptions—tops in the conference.

About Mayo Clinic: Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit comprehensive organization committed to clinical practice, education and research, providing expert comprehensive care to everyone who needs healing. [Learn more about Mayo Clinic](#). [Visit the Mayo Clinic News Network](#).

About CoSIDA (College Sports Information Directors of America): CoSIDA was founded in 1957 and is a 3,000+ member national organization comprised of the sports public relations, media relations and communications/information professionals throughout all levels of collegiate athletics in the United States and Canada. The organization is the second oldest management association in intercollegiate athletics. To learn more, visit cosida.com.

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