

Justin Herron of Wake Forest University, Deiontae Nicholas of Wayne State University and D.J. Wonnnum of the University of South Carolina Named 2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Nominees

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—**Justin Herron** of Wake Forest University, **Deiontae Nicholas** of Wayne State University and **D.J. Wonnnum** of the University of South Carolina—as nominees for the **2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award**.

Ten times during the 2019 college football season, three inspiring student-athletes from all levels of college football, who have overcome injury, illness or other challenges, will be recognized as **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Nominees** by a panel of writers, editors and sports information directors from CoSIDA, AP and *Touchdown Illustrated*.

Previous nominees are: **Ashton Antwine** (Northeastern State), **Kaleb Barker** (Troy), **Shaq Bond** (Utah State), **Jamieson Craske** (Stetson), **Aaron Crawford** (UNC), **Frazier Daniel** (Mount Union), **Jonathan Haden** (UAB), **Jaquan Hemphill** (Hardin-Simmons), **Caleb Huntley** (Ball State), **Jake Luton** (Oregon State), **Josh Paschal** (Kentucky), **Isaiah Pola-Mao** (USC), **CJ Sanders** (SMU), **La’Andre Thomas** (Memphis), **Amadeo West** (Army), **Drew Wilson** (Georgia Southern), **Octavion Wilson** (Salisbury) and **Antoine Winfield Jr.** (Minnesota).

At the end of the season, three of the nominees will be chosen as **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award** winners and will be recognized at a special ceremony during the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz. Additionally, \$30,000 will be donated in the names of the nine student-athletes selected as finalists 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.

Here’s a look at this week’s nominees:

Justin Herron, the starting left tackle for Wake Forest University, missed the entire 2018 season after suffering a torn ACL in the first game of the season versus Tulane. The 6-foot, 5-inch, 290-pound senior had started all 37 games during his first three seasons for the Demon Deacons. The Silver Springs, Md., native was selected as a co-captain by his teammates and has returned as good as ever, recording 16 pancake blocks, not allowing a sack and earning a grade of 91% from the coaches in leading Wake Forest to a 6-1 record.

Deiontae Nicholas, a running back for Wayne State University of the Division II Great Lakes Intercollegiate Conference, is back for a sixth season of eligibility after shoulder injuries limited his 2017 and 2018 seasons to just four and three games, respectively. The Chesterfield, Mich., native is WSU’s third three-time captain in their 102-year history. In six games he has 450 rushing yards on 70 carries, plus eight receptions for 98 yards. Over the past three weeks he’s rushed for 162 yards versus Northern Michigan and 178 yards in this week’s double-overtime win over

Ashland. This week, he surpassed the 3,000 career all-purpose yards plateau. He currently ranks third in the GLIAC in rushing yards per game (75.0), and third in yards per carry (6.4), while ranking just seventh in total rushing attempts. Off the field, Nicholas has been named to the Athletic Director Honor Roll five times and the Coach's Honor Roll four times while earning his bachelor's degree in journalism last year. He is currently working on his sports administration master's degree and serves as Division II SAAC National Vice Chair.

D.J. Wonnun, a defensive lineman for the University of South Carolina, was coming off an outstanding sophomore campaign in which he led the Gamecocks with 13 tackles-for-loss (TFLs) and six sacks and was named a permanent team captain. The Stone Mountain, Ga., native suffered an ankle injury in the opening week on 2018 that limited him to just five games. The 6-foot-5, 260-pound defensive lineman opened 2019 with seven tackles, including three TFLs versus UNC. Then, in the fourth game of the season, he was named SEC Defensive Player of the Week for the fourth time in his career after recording three sacks and a forced fumble versus Kentucky. For the year, he has 25 tackles, 4.5 sacks, 7.5 TFLs, an interception and a blocked kick. DJ's younger brother Dylan earned SEC All-Freshman honors last year and this season is South Carolina's starting right tackle. Off the field, D.J. was recognized as the Dr. Harris Pastides Outstanding Student-Athlete during the spring of 2019.

“We understand how challenging it can be for student-athletes to return from injury or illness,” says Dr. Michael Stuart, co-director for Mayo Clinic Sports Medicine. “We are honored to be part of this award that recognizes qualities like motivation, determination and perseverance.”

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