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Matthew Cracraft of Gallaudet University, John O’Kelley of UT Permian Basin and Elijah Sullivan of Kansas State University Named 2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Nominees

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—**Matthew Cracraft of Gallaudet University, John O’Kelley of UT Permian Basin and Elijah Sullivan of Kansas State University**—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*. CoSIDA members can nominate student-athletes at Comeback-Player.com.

Previous nominees are: **Ashton Antwine** (Northeastern State), **Kaleb Barker** (Troy), **Shaq Bond** (Utah State), **Jamieson Craske** (Stetson), **Aaron Crawford** (UNC), **Shaun Crawford** (Notre Dame), **Frazier Daniel** (Mount Union), **Jonathan Haden** (UAB), **Jaquan Hemphill** (Hardin-Simmons), **Justin Herron** (Wake Forest), **Caleb Huntley** (Ball State), **Jake Luton** (Oregon State), **Alex Martinez** (Saint Xavier), **Deiontae Nicholas** (Wayne State), **Josh Paschal** (Kentucky), **Sam Philippi** (Penn.), **Isaiah Pola-Mao** (USC), **Will Roberts** (MIT), **CJ Sanders** (SMU), **Hunter Spriggs** (Chapman University), **La’Andre Thomas** (Memphis), **Amadeo West** (Army), **Isaiah Weston** (Northern Iowa), **Drew Wilson** (Georgia Southern), **Octavion Wilson** (Salisbury), **Antoine Winfield Jr.** (Minnesota) and **D.J. Wonnun** (South Carolina).

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.

For more details, follow on social media at @ComebackPlayrFB and #MayoClinicCPOY, or visit www.Comeback-Player.com. Here's a look at this week's nominees:

Matthew Cracraft, an offensive lineman for Gallaudet University of the Division III Eastern Collegiate Football Conference, is a senior on college football's only team of deaf student-athletes. The Ferris, Texas, native suffered a torn ACL during team workouts in December 2018 and was forced to undergo reconstruction surgery in March 2018. The challenge of rehabilitating from the surgery was not unfamiliar to him as he had his other ACL repaired during high school. The injury forced him to miss the entire 2018 season. Cracraft was back on the Bison offensive line to start the 2019 season, appearing in all eight games for the Bison, which averaged 25.5 points and 323.3 yards per game.

John O'Kelley, a linebacker/defensive end for UT Permian Basin, a Division II school of the Lone Star Conference, tore his posterior cruciate ligament (PCL), ending his promising 2018 season after just four games. The sophomore from Groesbeck, Texas, was coming off a strong freshman season in which he was named the Lone Star Conference Freshman of the Year on the strength of 38 tackles, 5.5 sacks, three forced fumbles and four blocked kicks. While rehabbing his knee in the off-season, his father passed away following a long battle with cancer. Despite the injury and personal challenges, O'Kelley returned for the 2019 opener and is back to form with 29 tackles, 6.5 TFLs, 3.5 sacks and seven QBHs. His best game of the season came in the 48-38 win versus Eastern New Mexico, when he tallied eight tackles, 2.5 TFLs and 1.5 sacks.

Elijah Sullivan, the middle linebacker for Kansas State University, has made two comebacks in his young career. The first was on National Signing Day coming out of Tucker High School, when he was committed to another school, but they didn't have room for him, so he ended up signing with Kansas State. Then after appearing in 24 games in his freshman and sophomore campaigns, his 2018 season ended after just three games for an ACL reconstruction and a shoulder labral repair. Despite having to rehabilitate two different injuries at the same time, the Tucker, Ga., native was back at middle linebacker for the 2019 opener. He has played his best games against top competition, tallying six tackles, 1.5 TFLs and a sack in the upset of Oklahoma and nine tackles and a TFL this week versus Texas. On the season, he is tied for the team lead with 40 tackles.

"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."

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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