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Taijh Alston of West Virginia, Kyle Ford of USC and Dalvin Smith of Western Kentucky Named 2021 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Nominees

NEW YORK, NY. —The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), in association with The Associated Press (AP) and the Fiesta Bowl Organization, has selected three college football student-athletes — **Taijh Alston**, a junior defensive lineman for West Virginia University; **Kyle Ford** a sophomore wide receiver from the University of Southern California (USC); and **Dalvin Smith**, a freshman wide receiver from Western Kentucky University — as the final three nominees for the **2021 [Mayo Clinic](#) Comeback Player of the Year Award**.

Ten times during the 2021 college football season, three inspiring student-athletes from all levels of college football who have overcome injury, illness, or other challenges, are 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*. In December, three of the 30 nominees will be chosen as winners of the **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award** and recognized at a special ceremony during the PlayStation® Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 1, 2022, at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona.

Other nominees so far this season are **Terrel Bernard** (LB, Baylor); **Shamari Brooks** (RB, Tulsa); **Yohance Burnett** (LB, Tulsa); **Noah Cain** (RB, Penn State); **Sean Chambers** (QB, Wyoming); **Jack Coan** (QB, Notre Dame); **Brandon Council** (OL, Auburn); **Tobias Harris** (DB, West Texas A&M); **Ryan Hubley** (WR, Johns Hopkins); **Aidan Hutchinson** (DE, Michigan); **Brian Kearns, Jr.** (RB, Stonehill College); **Alex Keith** (DL, Washington & Jefferson College); **Cole Maxwell** (DL, Baylor); **Ricky Miezan** (LB, Stanford); **McKenzie Milton** (QB, Florida State); **John Mitchell** (TE, Florida Atlantic); **Jeremiah Moon** (LB, Florida); **Patrick Paul** (OL, Houston); **Cameron Rising** (QB, Utah); **Reggie Roberson, Jr** (WR, SMU); **Justyn Ross** (WR, Clemson); **Avery Samuels** (OL, Stetson); **Corey Sutton** (WR, Appalachian State); **Skylar Thompson** (QB, Kansas State); **Demitri Washington** (Edge, Boise State); and **J.J. Weaver** (LB, Kentucky).

Here's a look at the inspiring stories of this week's three honorees:

Taijh Alston, a redshirt junior defensive lineman for West Virginia University suffered the second major knee injury of his career in the second game of the 2019 season versus Missouri. During his rehab, the native of Lumberton, NC tore his Achilles tendon, which forced him to miss the entire 2020 season. The 6-foot-4, 245-pound defensive lineman began his college career at East Carolina, but before ever playing a down for the Pirates, he suffered his first major knee injury. He transferred to Copiah-Lincoln Community College in Wesson, Mississippi and had an impressive 2018 season recording 78 tackles seven sacks and 15 tackles for loss. He transferred to West Virginia in 2019 and despite missing most of that season, and all of the 2020 campaign, he has been a force for the Mountaineers with 28 tackles, five sacks and 9.5 tackles for loss.

Kyle Ford, a redshirt sophomore wide receiver at the University of Southern California has suffered bad luck with injuries throughout his career. A high school All-American and one of the top players in the 2018 recruiting class, he tore his ACL and was forced to sit out most of his senior year. During his freshman year at USC in 2019, the Corona, California native was still recovering from this injury and saw action in just four late season games, catching one pass for a 20-yard touchdown. Heading into the 2020 season, the 6-foot-2, 225-pound wideout was expected to compete for significant playing time, but during the off-season, he tore the ACL in his other knee, forcing him to miss the entire season. This year he has been healthy for every game, and in limited duty has caught nine passes for 128 yards, including a 36-yard touchdown versus Washington State.

Dalvin Smith, a redshirt freshman wide receiver for Western Kentucky University suffered a distal fibular fracture with syndesmosis separation while blocking against UT-Chattanooga on Oct. 24, 2020 and underwent surgery just three days later. Prior to his injury, the Glasgow, Kentucky native was off to a great start with four catches for 58 yards and two touchdowns in three games. This season, in which made the transition from tight end to wide receiver, the 6-foot-3, 190-pound wideout has made the most of his opportunities with six catches for 74 yards and four touchdowns in just seven games. This brings his career total to six touchdown catches on just 10 career receptions.

Past winners of the Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award have included: **2018** – Antwan Dixon (Kent State), Seth Simmer (Dartmouth), Antonio Wimbush (Carson-Newman); **2019** – Jake Luton (Oregon State), Drew Wilson (Georgia Southern), Octavion Wilson (Salisbury University); **2020** – Jarek Broussard (Colorado), Kenneth Horsey (Kentucky) and Silas Kelly (Coastal Carolina). For a complete list of past honorees and additional details on their remarkable comeback stories, visit www.Comeback-Player.com; follow via Twitter at [@ComebackPlayrFB](https://twitter.com/ComebackPlayrFB) via the hashtag #MayoClinicCPOY; and on Instagram at [@Comeback_Player_CFB](https://www.instagram.com/Comeback_Player_CFB). Mayo Clinic does not have any role in selecting the nominees or winners of the award.

About Mayo Clinic: [Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org) is a nonprofit organization committed to innovation in clinical practice, education and research, and providing compassion, expertise and answers to everyone who needs healing. Visit the [Mayo Clinic News Network](https://www.mayoclinic.org/news) for additional Mayo Clinic news. For information on COVID-19, including Mayo Clinic's Coronavirus Map tracking tool,

which has 14-day forecasting on COVID-19 trends, visit the [Mayo Clinic COVID-19 Resource Center](#).

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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