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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Antwan Dixon of Kent State University, Seth Simmer of Dartmouth College and Antonio Wimbush of Carson-Newman University Named Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners

ROCHESTER, Minn.—The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), in association with The Associated Press (AP), have selected three college football student-athletes—**Antwan Dixon** of Kent State University, **Seth Simmer** of Dartmouth College and **Antonio Wimbush** of Carson-Newman University—as the inaugural **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners**. The three players, recognized for overcoming injury, illness or other challenges, will be honored during an on-field ceremony at the 2019 Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Ariz., on New Year’s Day.

Dixon and Simmer were selected in a vote of AP College Football Poll Voters, while Wimbush was chosen by a vote of the CoSIDA small-college advisory board. Additionally, six players were named honorable mention by the editors of *Touchdown Illustrated*, the gameday publication for college football.

Mayo Clinic, the premier sponsor, will donate \$5,000 to the general scholarship funds at Kent State, Dartmouth and Carson-Newman in the name of the winners. Additionally, \$2,500 will be donated to each of the six schools in the name of the

players chosen honorable mention including: **David Blough** (Purdue University), **Eric Dungey** (Syracuse University), **Caleb Farley** (Virginia Tech), **Josh Poplar** (Tennessee Tech), **Sam Shook** (Ohio Northern University) and **Austin Tillman** (Washburn University).

“We commend Antwan, Seth, Antonio 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 three student-athlete football players chosen as **2018 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners** and six players recognized as Honorable Mention. For details on the 30 nominees, visit Comeback-Player.com or follow on Twitter at [@CFB_ComebackPOY](https://twitter.com/CFB_ComebackPOY).

Antwan Dixon, a wide receiver at Kent State University, was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a rare blood disorder, that first affected him in high school. Late in his freshman year of 2015 at Kent State, his symptoms returned and took a turn for the worse after leading the team with 355 receiving yards on 26 catches. He was forced to leave school and subsequently missed the 2016 and 2017 seasons. Dixon needed a life-saving bone marrow transplant, which his father gave to him, and had nine teeth removed to stop some of the bleeding. He went through eight days of chemotherapy treatments before the transplant. After nearly three years away from football, the Fort Myers, Fla., native returned to Kent State and on opening day he caught three passes for 48 yards and a touchdown at Illinois. His best game of the season came in the Golden Flashes’ 35-28 win over Bowling Green, when he caught six passes for 73 yards and a touchdown and ran the ball three times for 11 yards. In 12 games, the 5-8, 178-pound wide receiver led the team with 52 receptions for 532 yards and two touchdowns.

Seth Simmer, a junior defensive tackle at Dartmouth College, was diagnosed with a brain tumor in the spring of his freshman year. Doctors originally told him he would not play football again, but he got a second opinion at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., that assured him that if he had the surgery and recovered well, he could play again. He opted for the surgery, and on July 2, 2017, about 90 percent of the tumor, which had been pressing against his hearing and balancing nerves, was removed. The surgery took out his balancing nerve, forcing him to learn to walk again and

causing him to lose the hearing in his left ear. After missing the entire 2017 season, the Powder Springs, Ga., native returned to the field this year, contributing 11 tackles, including 1.5 for a loss. His play of the year came in the showdown between 7-0 Dartmouth at 7-0 Princeton, when he had a sack in the end zone for a safety, plus a fumble recovery for the Big Green.

Antonio Wimbush, a junior running back at Carson-Newman University, tore his ACL in the Eagles second game of the 2017 season versus St. Augustine. The Kingsland, Ga., native shocked his doctors and trainers with a grueling and aggressive physical therapy regimen. The hard work paid off, when he returned to the field for the Eagles 2018 opener, carrying 12 times for 96 yards in a loss to West Florida. A week later, Wimbush established a career high with 184 yards on just 21 carries and three scores in a 33-29 win at Virginia Union in which he was recognized as the South Atlantic Conference Player of the Week. In 11 games he carried the ball 151 times for 1,206 yards and seven touchdowns, added four receptions for 48 yards and a touchdown, and three punt returns for 33 yards. His 1,206 yards rushing led the South Atlantic Conference and was the 18th best single-season total in school history. The 5-foot-9, 190-pound halfback had a string of four straight 100-yard games at the mid-point of the season and finished the year with 100-yard rushing efforts in five of Carson-Newman's final six games. He moved up to 11th on both Carson-Newman's career rushing yards and rushing touchdown charts. His 8.0 yards per carry are the eighth highest single-season total in school history and the second highest total in NCAA Division II this year. He was named Division II All-Region second-team.

The six **Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award *Honorable Mention*** players are:

* **David Blough (QB, Purdue University),** who returned from a horrific right ankle dislocation last year to pass for more than 3,500 yards and 25 touchdowns in leading the Boilermakers to a 6-6 record, a memorable win over Ohio State and a berth in the Music City Bowl;

* **Eric Dungey (QB, Syracuse University),** who returned from a broken foot last November to lead the Orange to a 9-3 record and a berth in the Camping World Bowl on the strength of 3,400 combined rushing and passing yards and 32 total touchdowns;

* **Caleb Farley (DB, Virginia Tech),** who missed his freshman season due to a torn ACL in his first college practice and then, following the 2017 season, his mother lost her long battle with cancer. He returned to the field this year and in his first game on national television recorded two interceptions and a sack versus Florida State;

* **Josh Poplar (LB, Tennessee Tech),** who suffered a stroke in his dorm in July 2017 that required surgery to repair a hole in his heart and forced him to miss the entire year. He returned to the field this season to record 101 tackles and an interception which he returned for a touchdown in 11 games;

* **Sam Shook (OL, Ohio Northern University)**, the offensive tackle at the Division III school missed the entire 2016 season and all but four games in the 2017 season for a pair of foot injuries, both requiring surgery. He was named the AP Second Team Division III All-America, Ohio Athletic Conference Offensive Lineman of the Year and First Team All-OAC;

* **Austin Tillman (LB, Washburn University)**, who suffered a Grade 5 separated shoulder in the third game last year that required surgery and a grueling off-season rehabilitation regimen. His 111 tackles this year were third in the Division II Mid-America Athletic Conference and earned him all-MIAA Second Team honors.

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About Mayo Clinic

The title sponsor of CoSIDA's Comeback Player of the Year Awards program, Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit medical practice and medical research group with major campuses in Rochester, Minn.; Scottsdale and Phoenix, Ariz.; and Jacksonville, Fla. The Mayo Clinic Health System has dozens of locations in several states. Mayo Clinic was recently named the #1 hospital in the U.S. in the U.S. News & World Report rankings of top hospitals. It employs more than 4,700 physicians and scientists and 58,000 allied health staff. Learn more at www.MayoClinic.org.

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.

About Associated Press

The Associated Press is the essential global news network, delivering fast, unbiased news from every corner of the world to all media platforms and formats. Founded in 1846, AP today is the most trusted source of independent news and information. On any given day, more than half the world's population sees news from AP. On the web: www.ap.org.

About the Fiesta Bowl Organization

The Fiesta Bowl is a world-class community organization that executes innovative experiences, drives economic growth and champions charitable causes, inspiring pride in all Arizonans. As a nonprofit organization, it believes in the importance of community outreach and service. Through charitable giving, the organization strives to enhance Arizona nonprofit organizations that contribute to the success of communities through youth, sports and education. Since 1971, the Fiesta Bowl has worked to increase its footprint across the state and to benefit Arizonans year-round, during and outside of bowl season. In the month of December, the organization manages the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl, Cheez-It Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl Parade.

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