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Michael Penix Jr., Mohamed Ibrahim and Laiatu Latu Named 2022 College Football Comeback Player of the Year Award Winners

NEW YORK, NY – College Sports Communicators (formerly College Sports Information Directors of America [CoSIDA]), in association with The Associated Press (AP) and the Fiesta Bowl Organization, today announced **Michael Penix Jr.** (QB, University of Washington), **Mohamed Ibrahim** (RB, University of Minnesota), and **Laiatu Latu** (LB, UCLA) as the three winners of **2022 College Football Comeback Player of the Year Award**.

The award recognizes college football student-athletes for overcoming injury, illness, or other circumstances. The three honorees were selected in a vote by a panel of AP writers, editors, sports information directors, and Fiesta Bowl Organization representatives. Here's a look at their remarkable comeback stories.

Michael Penix Jr.

During his four seasons at the University of Indiana, Michael Penix Jr. suffered season-ending injuries every season. In both 2018 and 2020, he sustained season-ending ACL injuries, and in 2019 a right sternoclavicular joint injury ended his year after leading the Hoosiers to a 5-1 record. Then his 2021 season ended after five games due to an AC joint injury in his left throwing shoulder. In all, the talented lefty missed 25 of a possible 51 games.

Hoping a change of scenery would change his luck, in 2022, the Tampa, Fla., native transferred to the University of Washington. He led the Huskies to a 10-2 record and an upcoming showdown with Texas in the Alamo Bowl. He finished the regular season first in NCAA-FBS in passing yards (4,354) and yards per game (362.8), as well as second in total offense and third in completions per game. In all, he completed 330 of 500 passes with 29 touchdowns and only seven interceptions. He also added four rushing touchdowns. He was selected All-Pac 12 Second Team. Earlier this month, he announced that he would return to the Huskies for another season.

Mohamed Ibrahim

Following a pair 1,000-yard rushing seasons in his first three years and an All-Big Ten selection and Big Ten Running Back of the Year honor as a junior in 2020, Minnesota running back Mohamed Ibrahim was positioned to have a record-breaking senior season. But late in the third quarter of the season-opening game against Ohio State, after already rushing for 163 yards and two touchdowns on 30 carries, the Baltimore, Md., native suffered a ruptured left Achilles tendon and missed the rest of the season.

He chose to return to Minnesota rather than making himself eligible for the 2022 NFL Draft. Following a grueling rehabilitation regimen, in which he needed to re-learn how to walk, run, jump and cut again, he was ready for Minnesota's 2022 opener on September 1 against New Mexico State—364 days after the injury. He ran for two touchdowns and 132 yards, which was his first of 10 straight games rushing for 100 yards or more.

Ibrahim played in 11 of 12 games this year and finished fourth in the nation with 1,594 rushing yards and tied for second in the country with 19 rushing touchdowns. He also caught seven passes for 54 yards. He had a career year in 2022 and has played in 40 career games for the Gophers, carrying the ball 851 times for 4,597 yards (11th all-time in Big Ten history) and 52 touchdowns (sixth all-time in Big Ten history).

Laiatu Latu

After appearing in 12 games in reserve as a true freshman at the University of Washington in 2019, Laiatu Latu suffered a neck injury in practice leading up to the start of the 2020 season. Feeling strong and healthy, he continued to work out as if he would come back soon but sat out the pandemic-shortened four-game schedule with hopes to return in 2021. He went on to

have surgery and started to play rugby at a high level while at UW, all the time hoping to get back on the football field but ended up medically retiring.

Latu refused to accept that this was the end of his football career. He continued to play rugby and worked hard to put himself in position to play football again. The Sacramento native transferred to UCLA where he participated in non-contact drills during 2022 spring practices and continued to work hard during the off-season.

Latu played at a high level in all 12 games in the 2022 season for the Bruins, topping the UCLA team with 9.5 sacks and 11.0 tackles for loss. He also recorded 33 total tackles on the year to go with five QB hits, three forced fumbles and one fumble recovery.

Previous Comeback Player of the Year winners 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); 2020—**Jarek Broussard** (Colorado), **Kenneth Horsey** (Kentucky), **Silas Kelly** (Coastal Carolina); 2021—**Aidan Hutchinson** (Michigan), **McKenzie Milton** (Florida State), **J.J. Weaver** (Kentucky). For a complete list of past honorees, visit www.Comeback-Player.com.

About College Sports Communicators: College Sports Communicators (formerly College Sports Information Directors of America [CoSIDA]) is a 3,600+ member national organization, comprised of the athletic communications, media relations, digital and creative professionals throughout all levels of collegiate athletics in the United States and Canada. Founded in 1957, the organization is the second oldest management association in intercollegiate athletics. The organization's signature program is the Academic All-America program, honoring thousands of outstanding scholar-athletes annually. To learn more, visit collegesportscommunicators.com.

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Media Contact: Doug Drotman (doug@drotman-pr.com or 631-462-1198)