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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jonathan Haden of the University of Alabama-Birmingham, CJ Sanders of SMU and Antoine Winfield Jr. of the University of Minnesota 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—**Jonathan Haden** of the University of Alabama-Birmingham, **CJ Sanders** of SMU and **Antoine Winfield Jr.** of the University of Minnesota—as nominees for the **2019 Mayo Clinic Comeback Player of the Year Award**.

All three nominees have family connections to professional football. Haden’s brother Joe is an All-Pro cornerback for the Steelers; Sanders’ father Chris was a wide receiver for seven seasons with the Oilers/Titans; while Winfield’s father Antoine played 14 seasons as cornerback for the Bills and Vikings.

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: **Kaleb Barker** (Troy), **Aaron Crawford** (UNC), **Josh Paschal** (Kentucky), **Isaiah Pola-Mao** (USC), **Amadeo West** (Army), and **Octavion Wilson** (Salisbury).

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:

Jonathan Haden, a **University of Alabama-Birmingham** running back/wide receiver, recorded a career high 534 all-purpose yards during the 2017 season, before tearing his ACL on the final day of bowl preparation. The Washington, D.C., native and brother of Steelers cornerback Joe Haden, not only missed the Bahamas Bowl versus Ohio University, but he also missed the entire 2018 season. The 5-foot, 7-inch speedster picked up this season right where he left off 2017—as a triple-threat tallying 137 all-purpose yards rushing, receiving and returning. He has helped lead the Blazers to a 3-0 start with wins over Alabama State, Akron and South Alabama.

CJ Sanders, a **SMU** kick returner/wide receiver, was one of the most electric returners in college football during his three seasons at Notre Dame (2015-17), returning two kickoffs and one punt for touchdowns in 36 career games. After transferring to SMU in 2018, the Granada Hills, Calif., native was poised to break out until an ankle injury curtailed his season after just four games. Fully healed, the son of former NFL wideout Chris Sanders opened the 2019 season in style, returning a kickoff 98 yards versus Arkansas State in the Mustangs week one 37-30 victory. He's recorded 289 yards on 10 returns for the 4-0 Mustangs. Beyond football, as a youngster CJ accumulated nine movie and television show acting credits to his name, including playing a young Ray Charles in the movie "Ray" when he was 6, as well as appearances on the hit television shows "Cold Case," "Grey's Anatomy" and "Judging Amy."

Antoine Winfield Jr., a **University of Minnesota** cornerback, is a rare fourth-year sophomore due to back-to-back season-ending injuries after just four games—a hamstring in 2017 and foot in 2018. When on the field, the son of 14-year NFL veteran Antoine Sr. has proven to be an electric difference-maker. A native of The Woodlands, Texas, he has been awarded weekly honors from the Big Ten three times in the past two seasons despite playing just eight total games. In leading the Gophers to a 3-0 start this season, he's recorded 14 tackles, 1 pass defended, 1 sack and for the second straight year he sealed a win versus Fresno State with an end zone interception—this time in double overtime.

"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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