

A.J. Epenesa Named To Preseason All-American Football Team, Is On Watch List For Bednarik Award

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IOWA CITY, Ia. – Former Edwardsville High School football standout A.J. Epenesa is receiving preseason notice and honors as the 2019 NCAA and Big Ten football season is getting ready to start.

Epenesa, a 2017 graduate of Edwardsville, was named a first-team All-America on the defensive line by both CollegeFootballNews.com, which also named Epenesa its preseason player of the year. Athlon Sports, who annually publishes preview magazines in various college and professional sports, and is one of the most highly-respected publications of its kind in the nation, also named Epenesa first-team All-American.

Last season, Epenesa, who's 6' 6" and 260 pounds, led the Big Ten in sacks with 10.5, which was also 12th in the nation in the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision statistics. He

also forced four fumbles, which was second in the conference and 18th nationally and had 16.5 tackles for a loss, which was fourth in the conference. Overall, Epenesa had 37 tackles for the Hawkeyes, and also was credited with four pass break-ups, eight pass pressures and also blocked a punt.

Epenesa is also gaining notice for national awards as well. He was named to the watch list for the 2019 Chuck Bednarik Award, which is given to the nation's best defensive lineman, and is named for Chuck Bednarik, who was an offensive and defensive lineman at the University of Pennsylvania, and went on to become one of the National Football League's all-time greatest players with the Philadelphia Eagles, winning two NFL championships, in his rookie year of 1949, and his final season in 1960. Bednarik, nicknamed Concrete Charlie, was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1967 and died in 2015.

In addition, Epenesa was picked as the 14th best player in college football by Sports Illustrated magazine and has been gaining notice for the 2020 NFL Draft. In a mock draft in SI, he was predicted going as the sixth overall pick to the Detroit Lions, while another had him going as the second pick to the Miami Dolphins.

The Hawkeyes opening game will be at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City against Miami (Ohio) on Aug. 31 at 2:30 p.m. The Big Ten Conference championship game is set for Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Dec. 7.