

Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729-3685)

CONNETQUOT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW YORK VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 16, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Mackenzie Cole of Connetquot High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade New York Volleyball Player of the Year. Cole is the first Gatorade New York Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Connetquot High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the field, distinguishes Cole as New York's best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Cole joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including USA Volleyball players Kayla Banwarth (2006-07, Wahlert HS, Iowa), Alisha Glass (2005-06, Leland Public HS, Mich.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View HS, Neb.) and Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas HS, Fla.).

The 5-foot-10 senior outside hitter and libero led the Thunderbirds to a 39-1-2 record and the Class AA state championship this past season. A 2017-18 Under Armour First Team All-American, Cole recorded 333 kills, 292 digs and 74 service aces. The Long Island Player of the Year, she was also named a First Team All-American by FloVolleyball and earned First Team All-State honors for the third consecutive season.

Cole has raised funds to benefit pediatric brain cancer research and has volunteered locally on behalf of youth volleyball programs. "Mackenzie Cole is the best defensive player I have ever seen," said Lori Kessler, head coach at Shenendehowa High. "When she was in the back row, she was all over the place and showed an amazing read on the game. She made an impressive transition to outside hitter this year and was very effective hitting around blockers and finishing points. She's also one of the strongest servers we've faced."

Cole has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play volleyball on scholarship at Duke University this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Cole joins recent Gatorade New York Volleyball Players of the Year Yvette Burcescu (2016-17, Walter Panas High School), Sam Burgio (2015-16, Eden High School), Leah Meyer (2014-15, St. Mary's High School), Luisa Schirmer (2013-14 & 2012-13, Pittsford Sutherland High School), Melissa Rigo (2011-12, Elwood-John H. Glenn High School), Heather Feldman (2010-11, Eden High School), Mary Cushman (2009-10 & 2008-09, West Irondequoit High School), and Erin Little (2007-08, Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Cole will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.

###