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**BELLEVILLE WEST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® ILLINOIS BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 8, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced E.J. Liddell of Belleville West High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Liddell is the first Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Belleville West 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 Liddell as Illinois' best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in March, Liddell joins an elite alumni association of past state boys basketball award winners, including Karl-Anthony Towns (2012-13 & 2013-14, St. Joseph HS, N.J.), Dwight Howard (2003-04, SW Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.), Chris Bosh (2001-02, Lincoln HS, Texas), Paul Pierce (1994-95, Inglewood HS, Calif.), Chauncey Billups (1993-94 & 1994-95, George Washington HS, Colo.) and Jason Kidd (1991-92, St. Joseph Notre Dame HS, Calif.).

The 6-foot-7, 228-pound junior power forward had led the Maroons to a 27-2 record and a berth in the Class 4A Pekin Sectional semifinals at the time of his selection. Liddell averaged 20.9 points, 8.2 rebounds, 6.0 blocks and 2.9 assists through 29 games. Ranked as the No. 42 recruit in the Class of 2019 by Rivals.com, Liddell was a 2017 First Team All-State selection and a St. Louis Post-Dispatch All-Metro honoree. He entered the sectional semifinals with 1,656 career points, just 70 shy of the school record.

Liddell has volunteered locally as a mentor to freshmen and sophomores at his school and as a youth basketball coach. He has also donated his time to multiple community service initiatives through the Sigma Beta Club, a national organization dedicated to service. "What has helped Belleville West so much is that as the best player E.J. has been dedicated to the defensive end of the floor," said Darin Lee, head coach of Collinsville High. "And when he gets double- or triple-teamed on offense, he always finds an open teammate with a perfect pass rather than force a bad shot."

Liddell has maintained a B average in the classroom and represents one of the state's top academic candidates in meeting the Gatorade award's broad criteria. He will begin his senior year of high school 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.

Liddell joins recent Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Players of the Year Mark Smith (2016-17, Edwardsville High School), Charlie Moore (2015-16, Morgan Park High School), Jalen Brunson (2014-15 & 2013-14, Stevenson High School), Jabari Parker (2012-13 & 2011-12, Simeon Career Academy), Chasson Randle (2010-11, Rock Island High School), Rayvonte Rice (2009-10, Centennial High School), Matt Vogrich (2008-09, Lake Forest High School), Michael Dunigan (2007-08, Farragut Career Academy), and Derrick Rose (2006-07, Simeon Career Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, E.J. 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/>.

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