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**COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 8, 2018) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Robert Woodard of Columbus High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Woodard was the first Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Columbus High School when he won the 2016-17 award.

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 Woodard as Mississippi's 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, Woodard 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-6, 220-pound senior forward had led the Falcons to a 25-6 record and a berth in the Class 6A semifinals at the time of his selection. The state's returning Gatorade Boys Basketball Player of the Year, Woodard averaged 18.2 points, 9.6 rebounds, 2.0 blocks and 1.9 steals through 31 games. A First Team All-State honoree and a three-time member of the Clarion-Ledger Dandy Dozen, he has twice been selected to the USA TODAY's ALL-USA Mississippi First Team.

A member of the Mayor's Youth Council in Columbus, Woodard has volunteered locally on behalf of the United Way and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "Robert Woodard is just a phenomenal talent," said Robert Green, head coach at Clinton High. "His size and agility make him effective on both ends of the court, and he plays hard no matter the circumstance."

Woodard has maintained a weighted 4.18 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at Mississippi State 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.

Two-time winner Woodard joins Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Players of the Year Tyson Carter (2015-16, Starkville High School), Malik Newman (2014-15 & 2013-14, Callaway High School), Devin Booker (2012-13, Moss Point High School), Devonta Pollard (2011-12, Kemper County High School), Rodney Hood (2010-11, Meridian High School), Jake Stringer (2009-10, Forest Hill), Andre Stringer (2008-09, Forest Hill High School), Scottie Haralson (2007-08, Provine High School), and Ravern Johnson (2006-07, Coahoma County) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Robert 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/>.