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**ST. FRANCES ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® MARYLAND GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 19, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Nia Clouden of St. Frances Academy as its 2017-18 Gatorade Maryland Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Clouden became the second Gatorade Maryland Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Frances Academy when she won the award for her 2016-17 season.

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 Clouden as Maryland's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, Clouden joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Maya Moore (2005-06 Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.).

The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-7 senior point guard led the Panthers to a 24-4 record and a third-straight Interscholastic Athletic Association of Maryland A Conference state championship this past season. Clouden averaged 13.8 points, 3.1 assists, 3.1 rebounds and 1.2 steals per game. A two-time IAAM All-State selection, she is rated as the nation's No. 43 recruit in the Class of 2018 by espnW.

Clouden has volunteered locally as a peer mentor and as a youth basketball coach. "Nia made that team click," said Brad Rees, head coach of McDonogh School. "In critical situations, she was the one with the ball in her hands. She was also instrumental to the success of their defense."

Clouden has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at Michigan State University beginning 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 Clouden joins Gatorade Maryland Girls Basketball Players of the Year Mykea Gray (2015-16, National Christian Academy), Taylor Murray (2014-15, Annapolis Area Christian School), De'Janae Boykin (2013-14, C.H. Flowers High School), Amanda Fioravanti (2012-13, Our Lady of Good Counsel High School), Jonquel Jones (2011-12, Riverdale Baptist School), Taylor Brown (2010-11, Bishop McNamara High School), Kelsey Wolfe (2009-10, Seneca Valley), Tianna Hawkins (2008-09, Riverdale Baptist School), Tarik Hislop (2007-08, Paint Branch High School), and Marah Strickland (2006-07, Towson Catholic High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Nia 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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