

OAK MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ALABAMA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 20, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Nicole Payne of Oak Mountain High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Alabama Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year**. Payne is the first Gatorade Alabama Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Oak Mountain 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 track, distinguishes Payne as Alabama's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Payne joins an elite alumni association of state track & field award-winners, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-5 senior swept the 100, 200 and 400 meter dash events at the 7A state meet, setting class records in the latter two events with clockings of 23.74 seconds and 53.55. She also ran a blistering third leg on the 4x400 relay quartet that took second in 4:00.17, helping the Eagles to an eighth-place finish as a team. At the time of her selection, her state-record 400 dash clocking ranked No. 17 nationally among prep competitors. Her best wind-legal 100 finish (11.75) ranked No. 52 and her 200 time at state was tied for No. 23 in the country. Payne concluded her outdoor track career as the owner of two state records, a six-time state champion, a nine-time state medalist, a 10-time All-State performer, and as the holder of five Oak Mountain outdoor track school records. She graduates as the fastest 400 runner in Alabama history with personal-best times of 54.11 indoors and 53.55 outdoors.

A member of her school's Interact Club, student council, Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, and the Future Teachers of America organization, Payne also runs cross country and plays soccer. Last summer, she led a vacation bible school of 100 pupils, and she will participate in a week-long service-mission to Arkansas this summer to help the needy. A member of the Winchester Cumberland Presbyterian Church and a regular parishioner of the Winchester First United Methodist Church Youth, she participates in FUMC Mission Mondays, conducting community service initiatives with the church's youth group. Payne also serves as a local soccer referee, babysitter, and works at a daycare center. "Nicole Payne is the most decorated 400-meter runner in Alabama state history," said Oak Mountain head coach Riley White. "Her accomplishments on the track are incredible, especially when you consider she missed the 2016 outdoor track season with a torn [anterior cruciate ligament]. She's an amazing athlete, and an even better person."

Payne has maintained a 3.43 GPA in the classroom and has signed a national letter of intent to compete on an athletic scholarship at West Virginia 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. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Payne joins recent Gatorade Alabama Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Alonie Sutton (2017-18, Smith Station High School), Caitlyn Little (2016-17, Hoover High School), Brittley Humphrey (2015-16, Hoover High School), Kiara Williams (2014-15, Homewood High School) and Jayla Kirkland (2013-14, Woodlawn High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Payne also has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of her choosing. She is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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