

PANTHER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 **Morgan Smalls of Panther Creek High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year**. Smalls is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Panther Creek 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 Smalls as North Carolina'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, Smalls 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-10 junior won a national championship this past season, clearing six feet, 2.25 inches in the high jump to capture gold at the New Balance Nationals Outdoor. The height ranked as the nation's No. 1 clearance among prep competitors in 2019 at the time of her selection and No. 7 in U.S. girls prep history. Smalls also won two individual events at the Class 4A state meet, leading the Catamounts to the state championship as a team. She soared 40-9 to win the triple jump and captured the high jump with an effort of 5-10, while placing second in both the long jump and the 400-meter dash.

Smalls has volunteered locally with her school's Black Student Association and the Catamounts LEAD athletic leadership club. "Morgan is an amazing athlete, and she's also a team-first individual," said Wakefield coach Trent Wilson. "Even though the 400 is not her favorite event, she asked to run the 400 leg in the sprint medley relay, and anchored the relay to a national top five time. She alone scored 36 of our team's 56.5 points, leading us to a second consecutive team state championship."

Smalls has maintained a weighted 3.68 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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. 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.

Smalls joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Veronica Fraley (2017-18, Wakefield High School), Tamara Clark (2016-17, High Point Central High School), Anna Cockrell (2015-16 & (2014-15, Providence Day School) and Sydnei Murphy (2013-14, Apex High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Smalls 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.