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**LEESVILLE ROAD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 21, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Ryan Clifford of Leesville Road High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year**. Clifford is the first Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year to be chosen from Leesville Road 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 Clifford as North Carolina's best high school baseball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Baseball Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Clifford joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo High School, Mich.), Jon Lester (2001-02, Bellarmine Preparatory School, Wash.), David Price (2003-04, Blackman High School, Tenn.), Clayton Kershaw (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas), Rick Porcello (2006-2007, Seaton Hall Preparatory School, N.J.) and Kris Bryant (2009-10, Bonanza High School, Nev.).

The 6-foot-3, 210-pound sophomore outfielder and first baseman is ranked as the nation's No. 1 recruit in the Class of 2022 by Prep Baseball Report and No. 2 by Baseball America. The lone member of the USA Baseball 17U National Development Team from the Class of 2022, Clifford is a two-time gold medalist with USA Baseball youth teams. In four games this spring with Leesville Road, Clifford posted a .692 batting average with 10 runs scored, 12 RBI, three home runs and a 1.692 slugging percentage before the season was cancelled. As a freshman, he hit four home runs, drew 23 walks in 21 games and posted a .526 on-base percentage.

Clifford has volunteered locally as part of community beautification projects and as a youth baseball coach. He has also donated his time at WakeMed Children's Hospital. "Even with all the hype about him, Ryan goes out and works every single day," said Jake Jones, head coach of Leesville Road High. "At practice, I hit him fly balls and ground balls until he hardly can't breathe anymore. After that he goes and hits. He stops practice sometimes (with his long drives). People walking by the field stop and watch him take batting practice."

Clifford has maintained a 3.95 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his junior 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 and 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.

Clifford joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Players of the Year Owen White (2017-18, Jesse Carson High School), MacKenzie Gore (2016-17, Whiteville High School), Logan Davidson (2015-16, Providence High School) and Max Wotell (2014-15, Marvin Ridge High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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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