

ELIZABETHTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE KENTUCKY VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 9, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Jessica Smallwood of Elizabethtown High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Kentucky Volleyball Player of the Year.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation's best high school athletes for their excellence in sport, academics and community. The award recognizes Smallwood as Kentucky's best high school volleyball player, and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Kerri Walsh Jennings (1995-96, Archbishop Mitty High School, CA), April Ross (1999-00, Newport Harbor High School, CA) and Campbell Flynn (2024-25, Mercy High School, MI).

The 6-foot-6 senior right side hitter and middle blocker drilled 708 kills for an average of 6.6 per set, leading the Panthers (29-10) to the state postseason tournament this past season. Smallwood added 333 digs, 127 blocks and 121 service aces, earning Miss Kentucky Volleyball in the process. A two-time Junior Volleyball Association All-National Team selection and a USAV National Team Development Program invitee since 2023, she is ranked as the nation's No. 47 recruit in her class by PrepVolleyball. She concluded her prep volleyball career with 2,615 kills, 1,119 digs, 920 blocks and 375 aces.

Smallwood is a devoted member of the Severns Valley Baptist Church community and has volunteered in the parish nursery. She has also donated her time as a youth volleyball coach and instructor in a variety of scholastic and club capacities. "I think it's difficult to make an argument that anyone other than Jessica Smallwood was the best player in the state (this past season)," said Ron Weaver, head coach at DuPont Manual High School.

Smallwood has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to play volleyball at the University of Pittsburgh this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one state winner from each of the 50 states and Washington D.C., in 12 different sports: football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, baseball, softball, boys and girls soccer, and boys and girls track & field. In total, 610 high school athletes are honored each year. From the pool of state winners, one national winner is selected in each of the 12 sports. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the winners in each sport.

As part of Gatorade's commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$6.4 million in grants to winners across more than 2,200 organizations.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X (Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://www.x.com/Gatorade).

###