

SANDIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW MEXICO GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (March 13, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Kaiyah Benally of Sandia High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Basketball 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 Benally as New Mexico’s best high school girls basketball player, and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Candace Parker (2002-03 & 2003-04, Naperville Central High School, IL) Paige Bueckers (2020-21, Hopkins High School, MN) and Aaliyah Chavez (2024-25, Monterey High School, TX).

At the time of her selection, the 5-foot-7 sophomore point guard had led the Matadors to a 25-3 record this season and the quarterfinals of the 5A state tournament. Benally averaged 17.5 points, 7.2 rebounds, 6.5 steals and 5.7 assists through 28 games. The younger sister of two-time New Mexico Gatorade Girls Basketball Player of the Year Sydney Benally, she was named First Team All-District 2 and was the MVP of the World Tribes Invitational tournament in the fall.

Benally has volunteered locally with multiple youth basketball camps and has donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church. “Her ball handling, vision, efficiency and leadership were outstanding every time I watched her play,” said West Mesa High School head coach Manny Otero. “Her leadership is also something that does not show up in stat sheets, along with her contagious competitive spirit.”

Benally has maintained a 3.93 weighted GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior year of high school 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.

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