

THE URSULINE SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW YORK SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 5, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Ava Papaleo of The Ursuline School is the 2025-26 Gatorade New York Softball 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 Papaleo as New York’s best high school softball player and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Cat Osterman (2000-01, Cypress, TX), Alicia Hollowell (2001-02, Fairfield, CA) and Hannah Wells (2024-25, Coahoma, TX).

The 5-foot-5 senior centerfielder batted .548 with eight home runs and 37 runs scored this past season, leading the Koalas (17-6) to the Class AA, Section I Tournament semifinals. Papaleo also banged out 13 doubles and 31 RBI with 19 steals to compile a .685 on-base percentage and a 1.177 slugging percentage, playing errorless defense in center field. Ranked as the nation’s No. 4 recruit in the Class of 2026 by Line Drive Softball, she missed her entire junior season while recovering from elbow surgery.

Papaleo has volunteered locally with KIDFITSTRONG, a fitness and wellness program. Also a youth softball coach, she has donated her time as part of multiple fundraising campaigns to benefit children’s cancer and breast cancer research. “Ava is one of the best all-around players I’ve seen in my 30 years,” said Dean Marino, head coach of Harrison High School. “She commands the (batter’s box) and has the ability to take over games. If pitchers make a mistake, she doesn’t miss it.”

Papaleo has maintained a weighted 4.30 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to play softball at the University of Virginia 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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