

**KATY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE TEXAS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 5, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Ella Kate 'EK' Smith of Katy High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Texas 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 Smith as Texas’ 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-10 senior shortstop and right-handed pitcher led the Tigers (39-5) to the Class 6A Division 2 state championship this past season. Smith batted .628 with 57 RBI, 21 home runs and 52 runs scored, compiling a .694 OBP and a 1.398 slugging percentage for an OPS of 2.092. Ranked as the nation’s No. 2 prospect in her class by Perfect Game, she also compiled a record of 13-1 in the circle with a 1.88 ERA, striking out 121 batters in 67 innings, an average of 1.8 strikeouts per frame. She helped Team USA win the gold medal at the U18 WBSC World Cup Finals last fall.

A member of the Katy chapter of the National Honor Society, Smith has volunteered locally at the Houston Food Bank and at Davidson Elementary. She has also donated her time to multiple youth softball camps. “What makes her tough in the circle—besides her God-given ability to throw great pitches—is that she’s a top-tier competitor,” said Kelly Bembry, Alvin High School head coach. “She competes every pitch, every play. I told people when she was a sophomore that when she becomes a senior, it doesn’t matter what level of talent she has around her, she will win a state championship because she makes others around her better.”

Smith has maintained a 4.33 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to play softball at the University of Oklahoma 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.

###