

NAPERVILLE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ILLINOIS GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 18, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Emerson Burke of Naperville Central High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Illinois Girls Soccer 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 Burke as Illinois’ best high school girls soccer player, and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Mallory Swanson (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colorado), Riley Jackson (2021-22, Blessed Trinity Catholic High School, Georgia) and Addison Halpern (2024-25, Rutgers Preparatory School, New Jersey).

The 5-foot-9 junior forward led the Redhawks to a 22-1-1 record and the Class 3A state final this past season. Burke scored 40 goals and passed for 17 assists, breaking the school single-season records for goals and points (97) in a season. Burke scored twice in the state semifinals as Naperville Central High School beat Warren Township High, 5-0. Ranked as the nation’s No. 165 prospect in her class by TopDrawerSoccer and No. 10 in the Midwest Region, she was also the Illinois High School Soccer Coaches Association’s Player of the Year.

Burke has volunteered locally with the Veteran’s Club, which serves former servicemen and women in the community via home visits, hosting events and fundraising. She has also donated her time as a youth soccer coach. “Emerson is the most dynamic player every time she steps on the field,” said Steve Goletz, head coach of Naperville North High School. “She has the rare ability to beat defenders in multiple ways in order to get a goal for herself or assist a teammate. She’s a technically sound player and she’s proven this year that she’s a clinical finisher around the goal. You have to respect the way she plays the game on both sides of the ball as a forward, her relentless work rate and her desire to do whatever it takes to win.”

Burke has maintained a 4.03 weighted GPA in the classroom. She’s made a verbal commitment to play soccer on scholarship at the University of Michigan in the fall of 2027.

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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