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**RAYMOND HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 11, 2010) — In its 25th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Valencia McFarland of Raymond High School as its 2009-10 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Basketball Player of the Year.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the court, distinguishes McFarland as Mississippi's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, McFarland joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Maya Moore (2005-06 Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.)

The 5-foot-4 senior point guard led the Lady Rangers (30-1) to the Class 4A state title this past season, averaging 17.2 points, 5.2 rebounds and 4.3 assists. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Basketball Player of the Year clicked for 21 points, six assists and six steals in a 64-58 win over New Albany to give Raymond High its second straight championship—the Lady Rangers won the 2009 Class 3A title. McFarland is a two-time First Team All-State selection, a two-time *Clarion Ledger* Dandy Dozen honoree and is the nation's No. 38 recruit in the Class of 2010 as ranked by ESPN Hoopgurlz.

McFarland has maintained a 3.76 GPA in the classroom. An accomplished saxophone player in her school's concert band, she has volunteered locally as a counselor at summer basketball camps.

"Valencia McFarland is an incredible individual and an amazing basketball player," said Raymond High Head Coach Shay Jackson. "She is such a hard-working athlete and a complete joy to coach. She is truly a program changer."

McFarland has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of Mississippi this fall.

The Gatorade Player of the Year program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by ESPN RISE and the Gatorade high school sports leadership team, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

McFarland joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Girls Basketball Player of the Year April Sykes (2007-08 & 2006-07, East Oktibbeha County) among the state's list of former award winners.

To celebrate the award's 25th anniversary, Gatorade wants you to vote for the All-Time Greatest Players of the Year at gatorade.com/POY25. To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners, and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com.

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