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**NORTH MARION HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE® WEST VIRGINIA GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 11, 2010) — In its 25<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Mariah Byard of North Marion High School as its 2009-10 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Byard is the second Gatorade West Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from North Marion High School.

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 Byard as West Virginia'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, Byard 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.)

At the time of her selection, the 5-foot-10 junior guard had led the Huskies (20-1) to the Class AAA state tournament. Entering Wednesday's postseason opener, Byard owned averages of 15 points, 8.9 assists and 5.9 rebounds per game. The 2010 *Associated Press* West Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year, Byard eclipsed the career 1,000-point mark this season and led North Marion to the 2009 Class AAA state title.

Byard has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. A member of the National Honor Society and her school's student council, she has volunteered locally as part of a fundraising campaign to benefit earthquake victims in Haiti.

"Mariah Byard is such a team player and she's been a leader on this team ever since her freshman year," said North Marion Head Coach Mike Parrish. "She never takes a possession off and she plays hard all the time. I wish I had 10 players just like her every year."

Byard will begin her senior year of high school 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.

Byard joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Girls Basketball Players of the Year Whitney Bays (2008-09 & 2007-08, Huntington), and Mackenzie Maier (2006-07, Charleston Catholic) among the state's list of former award winners.

To celebrate the award's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Gatorade wants you to vote for the All-Time Greatest Players of the Year at [gatorade.com/POY25](http://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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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