

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Mason (412-561-1014)

**COAL CITY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® ILLINOIS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 9, 2010) — In its 25th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Kirsten Verdun of Coal City High School as its 2009-10 Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year. Verdun is the first Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Coal City 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 field, distinguishes Verdun as Illinois' best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Verdun joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Alicia Hollowell (2000-01, Fairfield HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Angela Tincher (2002-03, James River HS, Va.) and Kenzie Fowler (2006-07, Canyon del Oro HS, Ariz.).

The 5-foot-10 senior left-handed pitcher finished 40-0 with a 0.30 ERA this season, leading the Coalers (40-0) to the Class 2A state championship. Also the returning Player of the Year as named by *The Herald News*, Verdun recorded 480 strikeouts and 10 no-hitters in 235 innings and batted .565 with 80 runs scored, 70 RBI, 19 doubles and 12 home runs this spring. As a junior, she finished 31-3 with a 0.32 ERA and 447 strikeouts in 241 innings, also compiling a .528 batting average with 42 RBI, 39 runs scored and six home runs during the 2009 season.

Verdun has maintained a 3.30 unweighted GPA in the classroom. A member of her school's traveling choir group and Varsity Club, she has donated her time locally as a youth softball instructor.

"Kirsten is the ultimate competitor who has the desire and will to win," said Coal City Head Coach Brad Schmitt. "She is the best athlete—male or female—to come through the doors of Coal City High School. She has a tremendous work ethic and is a leader both on and off the field."

Verdun has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at DePaul University 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.

Verdun joins recent Gatorade Illinois Softball Players of the Year Emily Norton (2008-09, Oak Forest), Stephanie Kirkpatrick (2007-08, Plainfield Central) and Suzie Rzegocki (2006-07, Lemont) among the state's list of former award winners.

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.

###