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**NORTHWEST RANKIN HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI 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 Londen Ladner of Northwest Rankin High School as its 2009-10 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year. Ladner is the first Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Northwest Rankin 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 Ladner as Mississippi's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Ladner 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 state's returning Gatorade Softball Player of the Year, the 5-foot-9 senior shortstop and third baseman batted .573 with 53 walks, 26 RBI, 42 runs scored and five home runs this season, leading the Lady Cougars (22-6) to the second round of the Class 6A state tournament, where they eventually fell to DeSoto Central in a best-of-three series. Also the state's returning Player of the Year as named by *The Clarion-Ledger*, Ladner amassed a 1.286 slugging percentage and a .794 on-base percentage in 2010. As a junior, she finished with a .517 batting average, 38 runs scored, 28 RBI and seven home runs, leading Northwest Rankin to the 2009 Class 5A state championship.

Ladner has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has volunteered locally as part of multiple food drives and as a youth softball umpire as well as on behalf of the Salvation Army, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and a battered women's shelter.

"She's probably one of the best natural hitters I've laid eyes on," said Heidi Hill, head coach of rival Brandon High. "She plays shortstop, and she's just as sound defensively. Pretty much everyone in the state she played against pitched around her. That's how good she is. She has good hands and good eyes. She's smart. Put it this way: As a coach, I'd have a hard time pitching to her."

Ladner has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball 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.

Ladner joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year Whitney Kiihnl (2007-08 & 2006-07, South Panola) 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.

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