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

CHICAGO (March 10, 2011) — In its 26<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 2010-11 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.)

The 5-foot-10 senior guard has led the Huskies to a 22-0 record and a berth in the Class AAA state tournament, scheduled to begin March 10. Byard has averaged 18.6 points, 10.3 assists, 9.3 rebounds and 2.6 blocks per game while shooting 78.2 percent from the free throw line. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Basketball Player of the Year and four-time First Team All-State selection, she has helped North Marion to a 95-4 record and the last two Class AAA state titles in four years as a varsity starter.

Byard has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. The president of her school's chapter of the National Honor Society and the vice president of her class, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics, a food pantry and a homeless shelter.

"Mariah Byard is the best player in the state of West Virginia," said Adam Henkins, head coach of rival Morgantown High. "Her determination, her will to win and her overall athletic skills puts her a step ahead of everyone."

Byard has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at Ohio 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.

Two-time winner Byard joins fellow two-time Gatorade West Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year Whitney Bays (2007-08, 2008-09, Huntington) 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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