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**KELL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® GEORGIA SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 9, 2011) — In its 26th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPN RISE, today announced Kelsey Mericka of Kell High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade Georgia Softball Player of the Year. Mericka is the third Gatorade Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Kell 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 Mericka as Georgia's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Mericka 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-8 senior catcher batted .524 with 10 home runs and 32 RBI this past season, leading the Longhorns to fifth place in the Class 4A state tournament. The Class 4A Player of the Year, Mericka was a First Team All-State selection each of the last two seasons and was named to the All-Region team four times.

Mericka has maintained a 4.40 GPA in the classroom. A member of the Kell Robotics club, the Beta Club, and the National Honor Society, she is a physics tutor in her school, has raised funds to buy Christmas gifts for needy children and has volunteered locally on behalf of a baseball league for disabled children.

"Mericka is one of the best hitters to ever come out of Georgia," said Scott Kelly, head coach of rival Lassiter High. "She's also a very, very good catcher with a great arm. She's just a force."

Mericka has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Virginia Tech 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.

Mericka joins recent Gatorade Georgia Softball Players of the Year Lori Spingola (2009-10, Marist School), Hope Rush (2008-09, Eagle's Landing Christian Academy) and Kelli Wheeler (2007-08, Lassiter), 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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