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**ALEXANDER CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® NORTH CAROLINA 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 Chelsea Wilkinson of Alexander Central High School as its 2010-11 Gatorade North Carolina Softball Player of the Year. Wilkinson is the first Gatorade Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Alexander Central 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 Wilkinson as North Carolina's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Wilkinson 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 junior right-handed pitcher led the Cougars (31-2) to the Class 4A state championship this past season. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, Wilkinson posted a 31-2 record on the mound with a 0.66 ERA and 370 strikeouts in 212 innings pitched. Most Valuable Player of the state championship series in 2009 and 2011, she batted .358 with seven home runs and 34 RBI this spring. Wilkinson is a two-time Charlotte Observer Player of the Year and has twice been named a Second Team High School All-American by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association.

Wilkinson has maintained a 3.88 GPA in the classroom. Also a talented musician, she has volunteered locally on behalf of Christmas toy drives for needy children and fundraising campaigns to benefit cancer research.

"Wilkinson is very, very good," said Wayne Deans, head coach of rival D.H. Conley High. "She's not easily rattled and she has great command of any pitch she wants to throw."

Wilkinson 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.

Two-time winner Wilkinson joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Softball Players of the Year Tisha Mahon (2008-09, North Davidson) and Chelsea Leonard (2007-08, Central Davidson), 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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