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**WATERFORD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® CONNECTICUT SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 6, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced Kelli Connors of Waterford High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Connecticut Softball Player of the Year. Connors is the first Gatorade Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Waterford 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 Connors as Connecticut's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Connors 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-9 senior right-handed pitcher led the Lancers to a 24-1 record entering the Class M state semifinals, scheduled for June 5. A two-time returning Class M All-State selection as named by the Connecticut High School Coaches Association, Connors owned a 20-1 record in the circle with a 0.87 ERA and 151 strikeouts in 137 innings-pitched entering the state final four. Also the returning All-Area Player of the Year, she batted .379 with one home run and 19 RBI through 25 games. A member of Waterford's 2009 and 2010 Class M state championship teams, she entered the state tournament with a 67-4 career pitching record.

Also a volleyball standout, Connors has maintained a 3.04 GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a youth softball instructor, she has volunteered as a physical education teacher's assistant at The Friendship School and on behalf of The Colby Sousa Scholarship Fund.

"She's a hard-working kid," said Kate Peruzzotti, head coach at rival Fitch High. "What I admire most about her is how well she's done over the past four years—just the growth has been amazing, how she's dominated in the circle over her entire high school career. It says a lot about her. She's been remarkable."

Connors has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Florida Southern College 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 ESPNHS 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.

Connors joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Softball Players of the Year Brianna Turgeon (2009-10 & 2010-11, Fitch High School), and Rachele Fico (2007-08 & 2008-09, Masuk) 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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