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**BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® MINNESOTA 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 Nikki Anderson of Brainerd High School as its 2011-12 Gatorade Minnesota Softball Player of the Year. Anderson is the first Gatorade Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Brainerd 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 Anderson as Minnesota's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Anderson 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 Tinchler (2002-03, James River HS, Va.) and Kenzie Fowler (2006-07, Canyon del Oro HS, Ariz.).

The 5-foot-10 senior left-handed pitcher posted a 20-3 record in 140 innings pitched this past season, compiling a 0.80 ERA and 227 strikeouts in leading the Warriors (20-3) to the Class AAA sectional semifinals. A returning Class AAA Second Team All-State selection as named by the Minnesota Fastpitch Coaches Association, Anderson batted .389 with five doubles and 14 RBI in 2012. A three-time All-Section honoree, she led Brainerd to Class AAA state tournament appearances in 2010 and 2011.

Also an accomplished flutist, Anderson has maintained a 3.78 GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a classroom assistant/mentor at a separate site school for students with emotional and behavioral challenges, cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities and autism-spectrum disorder, she has volunteered locally at a soup kitchen, as a youth softball instructor, on behalf of Warrior Way Leadership and fundraising for her school's softball program.

"Nikki Anderson is by far the most talented pitcher we have ever had," said Brainerd head coach Mike Zauhar. "When Nikki is in the circle, we always have a chance to win as long as we can score a run. The control she has as a pitcher, as well as the movement on the ball, is phenomenal. And not many batters can get the bat around to hit the ball with her speed. She is a captain who leads by example and motivates her teammates to be the best they can be."

Anderson has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of Minnesota 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.

Anderson joins recent Gatorade Minnesota Softball Players of the Year Kelsey Anderson (2010-11, Burnsville High School), Sara Moulton (2008-09 & 2009-10, Eagan), and Chelsey Durland (2007-08, Orono) 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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