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**POPLARVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 6, 2013) — In its 28<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Rachel Hickman of Poplarville High School as its 2012-13 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year. Hickman is the first Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Poplarville 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 Hickman as Mississippi's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Hickman 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-6 senior right-handed pitcher posted a 27-4 record with a 0.58 ERA and 325 strikeouts against only 35 walks in 194 innings-pitched this past season, leading the Hornets (28-4) to the Class 4A state semifinals. Also a second baseman, Hickman batted .441 with a home run and 32 RBI. The two-time First Team All-State selection as named by The Clarion-Ledger produced a .490 on-base percentage and a .667 slugging percentage. As a junior in 2012, she owned a 19-4 record with a 0.30 ERA and 203 strikeouts in 139.1 innings-pitched, chipping in a .441 batting average with 26 RBI.

Hickman has maintained an A average in the classroom. In addition to painting a mural in the school's athletic training room as a service project, she has donated her time as a peer tutor and youth pitching instructor. She's also volunteered on behalf of her church's youth group.

"Rachel Hickman is definitely an exceptional athlete," said Donna Bragg, head coach of rival Vancleave High. "She is the type of player that can win the game for you both defensively and offensively. She is an awesome pitcher and a great hitter. Her sportsmanship has always been top-notch, no matter the score."

Hickman has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi 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 the Gatorade high school sports leadership team in partnership with [USA TODAY High School Sports](#), 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.

Hickman joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Softball Players of the Year Kelly Young (2011-12, Madison Central High School), Emily Davis (2010-11, Newton County High School), Londen Ladner (2009-10 & 2008-09, Northwest Rankin) and Whitney Kiihnl (2007-08 & 2006 - 07, South Panola) 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 [www.gatorade.com/poy](http://www.gatorade.com/poy).

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