

Contact: Matt Schiffman (312-729-3672)

**IMMACULATE HEART ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® NEW JERSEY SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 5, 2014) — In its 29th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Steph Thomas of Immaculate Heart Academy as its 2013-14 Gatorade New Jersey Softball Player of the Year. Thomas is the third Gatorade New Jersey Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Immaculate Heart Academy.

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 Thomas as New Jersey's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Thomas 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-4 senior right-handed pitcher owned a 30-1 record and a 0.50 ERA in the circle for the Eagles (30-1) at the time of her selection. Through 31 games, Thomas fanned 271 batters and issued just 16 walks in 181.2 innings pitched. A returning Third Team All-American as named by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association, Thomas owned a .525 batting average with 13 extra-base hits and 22 RBI entering the Non-Public A, North championship game. She owns state records for career victories and shutouts.

Thomas has maintained a 4.19 GPA in the classroom. A member of Immaculate Heart Academy's student council, she has also served as a student ambassador as well as the senior class event coordinator. She has volunteered on behalf of her church, a local retirement facility and Christian Actions Reaching Everyone programs in addition to donating her time as a youth softball instructor and fundraising to benefit the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

"What makes her so great is that she's a tremendous competitor," said Frank Baldino, head coach at Paramus Catholic High. "She's so driven. I've seen her for four years, and she's so steady. She's relentless. So consistent. There's no letting down, no matter the competition. Her performance speaks for itself. She's a special player and special person. She's so humble, and her focus is second to none."

Thomas has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Lafayette 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 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.

Thomas joins recent Gatorade New Jersey Softball Players of the Year Allyson Frei (2012-13, High Point Regional High School), Kelsey Dominik (2011-12, Kingsway Regional High School), Emily Bausher (2010-11, New Egypt High School), Lauren Gaskill (2009-10, Rancocas Valley Regional), Brittany O'Donnell (2008-09 & 2007-08, Red Bank Catholic) and Lyndsey PeQueen (2006-07, Toms River East) 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.

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