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## **BURKE HIGH SCHOOL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 19, 2014) — In its 29<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 Raven Saunders of Burke High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade South Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Saunders is the first Gatorade South Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Burke 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 track, distinguishes Saunders as South Carolina's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Saunders joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Allyson Felix (2001-02, Los Angeles Baptist, 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.), Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.) and Bianca Knight (2006-07, Ridgeland HS, Miss.).

The 5-foot-5 senior set a national prep record at the Taco Bell Classic in April, launching the shot put 56 feet, 8.25 inches to break a mark set in 2003 by nearly two feet. Saunders almost matched that effort at the New Balance Nationals Outdoor Championships, capturing a national title with a throw of 56-7.5. She also won two individual state championships at the Class AA state meet this spring, leading the Bulldogs to a 10th-place finish as a team. Saunders' 55-8.25 effort in the shot put broke the all-class state meet record by 11 feet, while her winning discus throw of 148-5 earned gold by more than 42 feet. Saunders launched the discus a season-best 159-11, which ranked as the No. 10 performance in the nation among prep competitors in 2014 at the time of her selection.

Saunders has maintained a B average in the classroom. The president of both the Burke High senior class and her school's student government, she has volunteered for two years as Burke's bulldog mascot at athletic events. Also an active participant in Burke's DECA chapter for emerging business leaders, Saunders has donated her time to SkillsUSA, a national student-empowerment organization.

"Raven Saunders is pretty amazing in the shot," said Tony Colizzi, head coach of Bishop England High. "To improve as much as she did from one state meet to the next is unbelievable. No one in the state was even close to her in any competition."

Saunders has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on an athletic scholarship at Southern Illinois University Carbondale 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.

Saunders joins recent Gatorade South Carolina Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Kaila Smith (2012-13, Beaufort High School), Jalacy Green (2011-12, Colleton County High School), LeAnna Morrison (2010 - 11, Berkeley High School), Briana Nelson (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, J.L. Mann Academy), and Jasmin Stowers (2006-2007, Pendleton) 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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