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**JACKSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA BOYS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 12, 2015) — In its 30th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Clayton Sparks of Jacksonville High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year. Sparks is the first Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Jacksonville 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 Sparks as North Carolina's best high school boys soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Sparks joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook HS, Mich.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, East Brunswick HS, N.J.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 6-foot-1 senior forward and midfielder scored 47 goals and passed for 12 assists this past season, leading the Cardinals (24-3-1) to the Class 3A East Regional championship game. Sparks tallied nine goals and two assists in Jacksonville's four-game run to the regional final, including two goals and two assists in a 4-2 win over Chapel Hill High in the regional semifinals. An All-American selection by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America, he concluded his prep soccer career with 121 goals and 52 assists.

Sparks has maintained a 4.2 weighted GPA in the classroom. A member of the Jacksonville High Rotary International Interact Club, he has volunteered locally as part of community-beautification projects and at the city's Senior Citizens Prom Night.

"We simply couldn't deal with CJay Sparks' strength, pace and quality," said TJ Rennie, head coach of New Hanover High. "I saw CJay as a great leader, fantastic individual player and the absolute driving force behind Jacksonville's success."

Sparks has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on an athletic scholarship at North Carolina State University beginning 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.

Sparks joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Boys Soccer Players of the Year Austin Stamey (2013-14, T.C. Roberson High School), Ade Taiwo (2012-13, Cardinal Gibbons High School), Jonathan Campbell (2011-12, Greensboro Day School), Cooper Vandermaas-Peeler (2010-11, Athens Drive High School), Teddy Mullin, (2009-10, Jordan High School), Ben Newnam (2008-09, East Forsyth), Watt Williams (2007-08, Broughton), and Clint Irwin (2006-07, Charlotte Christian School) 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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