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**L.C. BIRD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® VIRGINIA GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 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 Taja Cole of L.C. Bird High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Cole is the first Gatorade Virginia Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from L.C. Bird 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 court, distinguishes Cole as Virginia's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, Cole joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Maya Moore (2005-06 Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-7 senior point guard has led the Skyhawks to a 21-6 record and a berth in the Group 5A state semifinals against Thomas Edison High, scheduled for March 13. At the time of her selection, Cole was averaging 19.2 points, 5.4 rebounds, 5.4 assists and 3.3 steals per game, including a school-record 38 points in a 61-46 win over previously unbeaten Highland Springs in the 5A South Regional semifinals. A McDonald's All-American Game selection, she is the No. 27-rated recruit in the Class of 2015 by the Blue Star Basketball Report.

Cole has maintained a B average in the classroom. A member of the L.C. Bird High Leadership Program, she has volunteered locally at the Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU and as a youth basketball coach.

"Taja Cole's basketball IQ and her quickness make her dangerous on the court," said Carolyn Clay, head coach of Manchester High. "This girl knows how to get to the rim. She is a leader and knows her teammates' strengths and puts them in a position to be successful."

Cole has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of Louisville 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.

Cole joins recent Gatorade Virginia Girls Basketball Players of the Year Dorothy Adomako (2013-14, Cosby High School), Breyana Mason (2012-13, Forest Park High School), Caroline Coyer (2011-12, Oakton High School), Elizabeth Williams (2010-11 & 2009-10, Princess Anne High School), Tierra Ruffin-Pratt (2008-09 & 2007-08, T.C. Williams) and Jasmine Thomas (2006-07, Oakton) 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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