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**BEECHER HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE® ILLINOIS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 4, 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 Taylor Johnson of Beecher High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year. Johnson is the second Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Beecher 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 Johnson as Illinois's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Johnson 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-7 sophomore catcher and third baseman batted .624 with 15 home runs, 50 RBI and 58 runs scored this past season, leading the Bobcats (24-7) to the Class 2A sectional semifinals. A returning First Team All-Area selection as named by the Chicago Sun-Times, Johnson worked 24 walks and collected 31 extra-base hits, recording a .706 on-base percentage and a 1.312 slugging percentage. With 33 home runs through her first two prep seasons, she remains on pace to break the career state record of 54.

Johnson has maintained a 4.11 weighted GPA in the classroom and has served as vice president of her school's sophomore class. A member of the National Honor Society, she has also volunteered locally as a youth softball instructor, with Catholic Charities and as a fundraiser for Beecher High.

"Taylor is an incredible talent, and frankly there's no one better," said Nathan Lacher, head coach of rival Donovan High. "She plays the game at a level so far above all of her competitors it's unbelievable. We threw her three pitches to hit over the course of a doubleheader, and she hit all three for long home runs. Defensively, she understands the game so well. She is, hands down, the best softball player we have ever seen."

Johnson has verbally committed to play softball on scholarship at the University of Wisconsin beginning in the fall of 2017.

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.

Johnson joins recent Gatorade Illinois Softball Players of the Year Dale Ryndak (2013-14, Downers Grove North High School), Abby Ramirez (2012-13, Trinity High School), Lilly Fecho (2011-12, Glenbard North High School), Brianna LeBeau (2010-11, Richards High School), Kirsten Verdun (2009-10, Coal City), Emily Norton (2008-09, Oak Forest), Stephanie Kirkpatrick (2007-08, Plainfield Central), and Suzie Rzegocki (2006-07, Lemont) 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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