

Contact: Matt Schiffman (312-729-3672)

**CAHOKIA HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS BOYS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 19, 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 Ja'Mari Ward of Cahokia High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Ward is the first Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Cahokia 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 Ward as Illinois's best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Ward joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Meb Keflezighi (1993-94, San Diego HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.) and Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.).

The 6-foot, 150-pound junior won two individual events and contributed to two state-record relay clockings at the Class 2A state meet this spring, leading the Comanches to the state championship as a team. The state's returning Gatorade Boys Track and Field Athlete of the Year, Ward broke the state record in the long jump with a leap of 25 feet, 0.25 inches and won the triple jump with a mark of 50-6. He anchored the 4x100 relay quartet to a victory in 41.12 and ran the second leg on the 4x200 relay, which won in 1:25.83. Ward's season-best triple jump of 51-11 ranked as the nation's No. 1 performance among prep competitors in 2015 at the time of his selection, while his top long jump of 25-6.5 ranked No. 2.

Ward has maintained a 3.67 GPA in the classroom. He has served as an elementary school tutor and has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics as well as community clean-up initiatives.

"Ja'Mari is the type of kid who doesn't like to lose," said Cahokia head coach Leroy Millsap. "He's very motivated and I think he's going to break the high school world record in the long jump. The key is that he has to be healthy to do it."

Ward will begin his senior year of high school 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.

Two-time winner Ward joins Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Athletes of the Year Kyle Landon (2012-13, Chester High School), Carl Heinz (2011-12, Oak Park River Forest High School), Zach Ziemek (2010-11, Lake Park High School), Logan Pflibsen (2009-10, Streator Township), Dan Block (2008-09, Lake Park), Mat Smoody (2007-08, Palatine), and Evan Jager (2006-07, Jacobs) 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.

###