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**MOTHER MCAULEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 17, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Charley Niego of Mother McAuley High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Player of the Year. Niego is the first Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Mother McAuley 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 Niego as Illinois's best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Niego joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including USA Volleyball players Kayla Banwarth (2006-07, Wahlert HS, Iowa), Alisha Glass (2005-06, Leland Public HS, Mich.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View HS, Neb.) and Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas HS, Fla.).

The 6-foot junior outside hitter led the Mighty Macs to a 38-1 record, the Class 4A state championship and the No. 1 national ranking by PrepVolleyball.com this past season. Niego tallied 498 kills, 473 digs, 69 blocks and 25 service aces while posting a kill percentage of .478 and a hitting percentage of .387. A MaxPreps First Team All-American, she recorded 57 kills and 59 digs in the Mighty Macs' four-match state tournament run to the title.

Niego has volunteered locally preparing meals for families at the Ronald McDonald House as well as serving and feeding area homeless. She has also donated her time as a youth volleyball coach. "Charley can execute any shot offensively hitting a variety of sets," said Mark Wasik, head coach of Downers Grove North High. "What separates Charley the most from other exceptional players is her focus and competitiveness."

Niego has maintained a weighted 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play volleyball on scholarship at the University of Notre Dame beginning in the fall of 2018.

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 Player of the Year Selection Committee, 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.

Niego joins recent Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Players of the Year Molly Haggerty (2015-16 & 2014-15, St. Francis High School), Ali Frantti (2013-14, Richmond-Burton Community High School), Lauren Carlini (2012-13, West Aurora High School), Alexis Viliunas (2011-12, Lyons Township High School), Kelly Lamberti (2010-11, Cary-Grove High School), Annemarie Hickey (2009-10, Joilet Catholic Academy), Hannah Werth (2008-09, Glenwood High School) and Kelly Murphy (2007-08, Joliet Catholic Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Niego will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. 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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