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**EDWARDSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® ILLINOIS BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 20, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Mark Smith of Edwardsville High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Smith is the first Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Edwardsville 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 Smith as Illinois's best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in March, Smith joins an elite alumni association of past state boys basketball award winners, including Karl-Anthony Towns (2012-13 & 2013-14, St. Joseph HS, N.J.), Dwight Howard (2003-04, SW Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.), Chris Bosh (2001-02, Lincoln HS, Texas), Paul Pierce (1994-95, Inglewood HS, Calif.), Chauncey Billups (1993-94 & 1994-95, George Washington HS, Colo.) and Jason Kidd (1991-92, St. Joseph Notre Dame HS, Calif.).

The 6-foot-4, 225-pound senior point guard had led the Tigers to a 30-1 record and a berth in the Class 4A Super-Sectional at the time of his selection. Smith averaged 22.2 points, 8.6 assists, 8.3 rebounds and 2.1 steals through 31 games. He had recorded 14 double-doubles and two triple-doubles, and poured in 45 points to go with 13 rebounds in an 81-59 win over Danville High in the sectional final. The MVP of three in-season tournaments this season, Smith was a 2016 St. Louis Post-Dispatch All-Metro honoree and earned 2016 Belleville News Democrat First Team recognition.

A member of his school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, Smith has volunteered locally as a youth basketball and baseball coach. "Mark has been great this year. He has improved and elevated his game so much," said Rick Gibson, head coach of O'Fallon High. "He is such a strong and powerful guard that he is hard to contain. He gets to the basket so easily and is really explosive in and around the basket."

Smith has maintained a 3.24 GPA in the classroom and represents one of the state's top academic candidates in meeting the Gatorade award's broad criteria. He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Smith joins recent Gatorade Illinois Boys Basketball Players of the Year Charlie Moore (2015-16, Morgan Park High School), Jalen Brunson (2014-15 & 2013-14, Stevenson High School), Jabari Parker (2012-13, Simeon Career Academy), Chasson Randle (2010-11, Rock Island High School), Rayvonte Rice (2009-10, Centennial High School), Matt Vogrich (2008-09, Lake Forest High School), Michael Dunigan (2007-08, Farragut Career Academy), and Derrick Rose (2006-07, Simeon Career Academy) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Mark 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 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.