

**Contact: John Manzo (312-729-3656)**

**COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 20, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Robert Woodard of Columbus High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Woodard is the first Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Columbus 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 Woodard as Mississippi'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, Woodard 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-6, 225-pound junior guard led the Falcons to a 16-12 record and the Class 6A state tournament this past season. Woodard averaged 25.2 points, 13.1 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 3.0 blocks per game. A First Team All-State selection and a two-time member of the Clarion-Ledger Dandy Dozen, he is a former member of the USA Basketball Men's U16 National Team and was named the USA TODAY's ALL-USA Mississippi Player of the Year as a sophomore.

A member of the Mayor's Youth Council in Columbus, Woodard has volunteered locally on behalf of the United Way and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "Robert Woodard is by far the best player I've coached against in 15 years," said Ron Wilson, head coach at Southaven High. "He's got an NBA body, he's a great shooter and passer, he can rebound and he can play multiple positions. He also shows great attitude and composure."

Woodard has maintained a weighted 4.11 GPA in the classroom. He 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 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.

Woodard joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Boys Basketball Players of the Year Tyson Carter (2015-16, Starkville High School), Malik Newman (2014-15 & 2013-14, Callaway High School), Devin Booker (2012-13, Moss Point High School), Devonta Pollard (2011-12, Kemper County High School), Rodney Hood (2010-11, Meridian High School), Jake Stringer (2009-10, Forest Hill High School), Andre Stringer (2008-09, Forest Hill High School), Scottie Haralson (2007-08, Provine High School), and Ravern Johnson (2006-07, Coahoma County High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Robert 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](http://www.gatorade.com/poy).