

LIBERTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE IOWA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (July 2, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Ashlyn Keeney of Liberty High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Iowa Girls Track & Field Player of the Year. Keeney is the first Gatorade Iowa Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Liberty 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 Keeney as Iowa's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Keeney joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The state's 2018-19 Gatorade Girls Track & Field Player of the Year, the 5-foot-5 junior won the 800- and 1,500-meter events at the Class 4A state meet and took second in the 3,000, leading the Lightning to a seventh-place finish as a team. At the time of her selection, Keeney's season-best clocking of 9:58.57 in the 3,000 ranked No. 23 nationally among prep competitors in the event in 2021. Her winning time of 4:39.24 in the 1,500 at the prestigious Drake Relays ranked No. 42 nationally. A two-time Mississippi Valley Conference Track Athlete of the Year, she suffered a rare eye infection as well as a labral tear and hamstring tendinitis that hampered her sophomore and junior cross country seasons.

Keeney has volunteered locally at the Iowa City Community Crisis Center, and she has donated her time as a freshman tutor and youth track coach. "Ashlyn was able to persevere through difficult obstacles because of her commitment and dedication to this sport that she loves," said Keaton Rickels, head coach of Liberty High. "She is highly self-motivated and strives for excellence in everything that she does."

Keeney has maintained a weighted 4.23 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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 works 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 Keeney joins recent Gatorade Iowa Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Mackenzie Michael (2019-20, Cedar Falls High School), Sydney Milani (2017-18, Southeast Polk High School), and Joy Ripplinger (2016-17, Assumption High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Keeney has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Keeney is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization they chose is deserving of one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants, which will be announced throughout the year. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$2.7 million across 1,117 organizations.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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