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**MOUNT CARMEL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ILLINOIS BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 30, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Alek Thomas of Mount Carmel High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Illinois Baseball Player of the Year. Thomas is the first Gatorade Illinois Baseball Player of the Year to be chosen from Mount Carmel 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 Thomas as Illinois's best high school baseball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Baseball Player of the Year, Thomas joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo High School, Mich.), Jon Lester (2001-02, Bellarmine Preparatory School, Wash.), David Price (2003-04, Blackman High School, Tenn.), Clayton Kershaw (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas), Rick Porcello (2006-2007, Seaton Hall Preparatory School, N.J.) and Kris Bryant (2009-10, Bonanza High School, Nev.).

The 5-foot-11, 179-pound junior outfielder had led the Caravan to a 26-9 record at the time of his selection. Thomas owned a .470 batting average with five triples, 11 home runs, 43 RBI and 59 runs scored through 35 games. An All-State honoree as a sophomore, he is a Rawlings/Perfect Game First Team Underclass All-American and was selected to USA TODAY's American Family Insurance ALL-USA Illinois First Team.

Thomas has raised funds to benefit inner-city sports programs and has volunteered locally on behalf of the PLAY campaign, which combats childhood obesity. "Alek Thomas is the real deal," said Nick Hall, head coach at St. Francis High. "No one in the state plays a better center field, and there's no one who's as complete a player."

Thomas has maintained a 3.84 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.

Thomas joins recent Gatorade Illinois Baseball Players of the Year Tyler Fitzgerald (2015-16, Rochester High School), Charlie Donovan (2014-15, Westmont High School), Evan Skoug (2013-14, Libertyville High School), Ryne Roper (2012-13, Harrisburg High School), Kyle Funkhouser (2011-12, Oak Forest High School), Charlie Tilson (2010-11, New Trier Township High School), Jake DePew (2009-10, Granite City High School), Kevin Koziol (2008-09, Brother Rice High School), Jake Odorizzi (2007-08, Highland High School), and Jake Smolinski (2006-07, Boylan Catholic High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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

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