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**NESHOPA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE® MISSISSIPPI SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 5, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Aspen Wesley of Neshoba Central High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year. Wesley is the second Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Neshoba Central 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 Wesley as Mississippi's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Wesley joins an elite alumni association of past state softball award-winners, including Catherine Osterman (2000-01, Cy Spring High School, Texas), Kelsey Stewart (2009-10, Arkansas City High School, Kan.), Carley Hoover (2012-13 D.W. Daniel High School, S.C.), Jenna Lilley (2012-13, Hoover High School, Ohio), Morgan Zerkle (2012-13 Cabell Midland High School, W. Va.), and Rachel Garcia (2014-15, Highland High School, Calif.).

The returning Gatorade State Player of the Year, the 5-foot-3 sophomore right-handed pitcher and outfielder led the Rockets to a 30-3 record and a second straight Class 5A state championship this past season. Wesley posted a 25-2 mark in the circle with a 0.77 earned run average and 349 strikeouts in 180.2 innings pitched. She was even better in the postseason with six shutouts in nine games, and she hit both of her home runs in the playoffs, including one in the title-clinching win over Picayune High. A four-time First Team All-State selection, Wesley concluded her sophomore year with an 86-4 record and 1,015 strikeouts in her prep softball career.

A member of her school's chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Wesley has volunteered locally as a youth softball coach. "Aspen was dominant on the mound this year," said Lindsay McMullen, head coach of Germantown High. "She was able to mix pitches well and use her rise ball as a strike-out pitch. Neshoba struggled at the plate so they relied on Aspen to keep it a low-scoring game."

Wesley has maintained a B average in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play softball on scholarship at Mississippi State University beginning in the fall of 2019.

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.

Two time winner, Wesley joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Softball Players of the Year, Hailey Lunderman (2014-15, Neshoba Central High School), Darby Bishop (2013-14, Newton County High School), Rachel Hickman (2012-13, Poplarville High School), Kelly Young (2011-12, Madison Central High School), Emily Davis, (2010-11, Newton County High School), Londen Ladner (2009-10 & 2008-09, Northwest Rankin High School), and Whitney Kiihnl (2007-08 & 2006-07, South Panola High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Aspen 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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