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**LA CUEVA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE® NEW MEXICO 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 Andrea Howard of La Cueva High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade New Mexico Softball Player of the Year. Howard is the second Gatorade New Mexico Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from La Cueva 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 Howard as New Mexico's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Howard 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 5-foot-6 senior center fielder led the Bears (28-0) to the Class 6A state championship this past season. Howard compiled a .598 batting average with 10 home runs, 48 RBI and 47 runs scored. A two-time First Team All-State selection, she was also named the Albuquerque Journal Metro Player of the Year in each of the past two seasons.

A member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Howard has volunteered locally on behalf of a food bank and an elementary school literacy-outreach initiative. "Andrea Howard showed great leadership and drive for the game, and her non-stop effort on the field was very impressive," said Brandi Thomas, head coach at Clovis High. "She simply rakes at the plate, and in the field I've seen her make some amazing plays in the gap."

Howard has maintained a 4.25 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of New Mexico 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.

Howard joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Softball Players of the Year Santana Parra (2015-16, Centennial High School), BreOnna Castaneda (2014-15, Rio Rancho High School), Nicole Pendley (2013-14, Rio Rancho High School), Jasmine Casados (2012-13, La Cueva High School), Katera Eltsosie (2011-12, Volcano Vista High School), Karysta Donisthorpe (2010-11 & 2009-10, Piedra Vista High School), Melissa Martinez (2008-09 & 2007-08, Cibola High School), and Karisa Medrano (2006-07, St. Pius X High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Andrea 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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