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**MIDDLEBURY UNION HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® VERMONT SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 5, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Payton Buxton of Middlebury Union High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Vermont Softball Player of the Year. Buxton is the first Gatorade Vermont Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Middlebury Union 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 Buxton as Vermont's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award announced in June, Buxton 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-5 senior right-handed pitcher had led the Tigers to a 12-4 record and the Division 1 state tournament at the time of her selection. Buxton owned a 10-4 record and a 1.80 ERA in the circle along with a .500 batting average, three home runs and 22 runs scored through 16 games. She struck out 153 batters with just 16 walks in 97 innings pitched. A First Team All-Metro selection, Buxton is a two-time Addison Independent Player of the Year.

Buxton has volunteered locally on behalf of the United Way and youth sports programs. "Payton Buxton is a true competitor and she's been pitching extremely well all year," said Leslie Dunn, head coach at North Country Union High School. "Offensively, she's a major threat not only in the batter's box, but on the bases as well."

Buxton has maintained a 3.90 GPA in the classroom. She will attend Bates College this fall, where she will play softball.

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.

Buxton joins recent Gatorade Vermont Softball Players of the Year Allison Rutz (2015-16, Essex High School), Baylee Ports (2014-15, Mount Anthony Union High School), Kayla Mathieu (2013-14, Bellows Free Academy-Fairfax), Kayla Wood (2012-13, Brattleboro Union High School), Alexis Perry (2011-12 & 2009-10, Essex High School), Chelsea Abbott (2010-11, Bellows Free Academy), Stephanie Frank (2008-09 & 2007-08, Essex High School), and Amanda Downey (2006-07, Essex High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Payton 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.

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