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**CIBOLA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEW MEXICO GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 19, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Lexi Baca of Cibola High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Player of the Year. Baca is the first Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Cibola 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 Baca as New Mexico's best high school girls soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Baca joins an elite alumni association of past state soccer award-winners, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook HS, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel HS, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02, 2002-03, East Brunswick HS, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-04, Blue Valley West HS, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire HS, Mass.), Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista HS, Colo.).

The 5-foot-5 junior forward led the Cougars to a 16-3-2 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. Baca scored 24 goals and passed for 10 assists. A two-time New Mexico Soccer Coaches Association Class 6A Player of the Year, Baca is also a two-time First Team All-State selection and a member of the U.S. Youth Soccer Region IV Olympic Development Program team. She concluded her junior year with 58 goals and 28 assists in her prep soccer career.

Baca has volunteered locally making and serving meals at an emergency shelter and as a summer camp counselor. "Lexi has very strong one-vs-one skills and is an outstanding finisher," said Uwe Balzis, head coach of Rio Rancho High School. "She played the biggest role in their championship run because you always had to have her covered. Usually one defender was not enough."

Baca, who attends New Mexico Connections Academy, has maintained a 3.91 GPA in the classroom and ranks No. 1 in her class. She has made a verbal commitment to play soccer on scholarship at the University of New Mexico beginning in the fall of 2018.

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.

Baca joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Girls Soccer Players of the Year Jordyn Lacy (2015-16, La Cueva High School), Cassie Boren (2014-15, La Cueva High School), Zoie Hensley (2013-14, Taos High School), Courtney Riley (2012-13, La Cueva High School), Erika Nelson (2011-12, Hope Christian High School), Victoria Barba (2010-11, Sandia High School), Jenni White (2009-10, Albuquerque Academy), Victoria Barba (2008-09, Sandia High School), Courtney Tinnin (2007-08, St. Pius X High School), and Alexis Ball (2006-07, La Cueva High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Lexi 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 us on Twitter. 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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