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**OLATHE NORTHWEST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 16, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Taylor Kuper of Olathe Northwest High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Kansas Volleyball Player of the Year. Kuper is the first Gatorade Kansas Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Olathe Northwest 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 Kuper as Kansas' best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Kuper joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including USA Volleyball players Kayla Banwarth (2006-07, Wahlert HS, Iowa), Alisha Glass (2005-06, Leland Public HS, Mich.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View HS, Neb.) and Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas HS, Fla.).

The 5-foot-9 senior outside hitter and defensive specialist led the Ravens to a 40-4 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. Kuper notched 472 kills, 270 digs, 106 service aces and 29 blocks while posting a kill percentage of .458. An American Volleyball Coaches Association Third Team All-American selection, Kuper was a Class 6A First Team All-State honoree. She concluded her prep volleyball career with 1,224 kills and 925 digs.

Kuper has volunteered locally as a peer mentor and as a youth volleyball coach. "Taylor was an impact player from both the front and back row," said Alex Fitzmorris, head coach of Gardner-Edgerton High. "She was not only the best defensive player on her team but arguably the best in the state, and I believe she's the best offensive player in the state as well."

Kuper has maintained a weighted 3.92 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play volleyball on scholarship at the University of Illinois 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.

Kuper joins recent Gatorade Kansas Volleyball Players of the Year Madison Lilley (2016-17, Blue Valley West High School), Jenna Gray (2015-16, St. James Academy), Carlyle Nusbaum (2014-15, Saint Thomas Aquinas High School), Kali Eaken (2013-14, Bishop Miege High School), Cassie Wait (2012-13, Gardner-Edgerton High School), Paige Brown (2011-12, St. James Academy), Hanna Forst (2010-11, St. James Academy), Chelsea Cook (2009-10, Blue Valley North High School), Caitlyn Donahue (2008-09, Blue Valley West High School) and Kathleen Ludwig (2007-08, Bishop Miege High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Kuper 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 <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.

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