

Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729- 3685)

**NEUSE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 19, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Izabela Nicoletti of Neuse Christian Academy as its 2017-18 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Nicoletti is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Neuse Christian Academy.

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 Nicoletti as North Carolina's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, Nicoletti joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Maya Moore (2005-06 Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-10 senior guard led the Lions to a 22-5 record and the North Carolina Independent Schools Class 1A state championship game this past season. Nicoletti averaged 19.9 points, 4.4 rebounds, 3.7 assists and 1.9 steals per game. A Women's Basketball Coaches Association First Team All-American, she has been chosen to play in the McDonald's All-American Game and the Jordan Brand Classic. Nicoletti is ranked as the nation's No. 6 recruit in the Class of 2018 by espnW and was named the Mid-Carolina Conference Player of the Year.

Nicoletti has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics, a homeless shelter and youth basketball programs. "Izabela Nicoletti is just a superstar athlete," said Greg Hardy, head coach at Cresset Christian Academy. "She delivers the ball well, she handles the ball well and she can score at will. The game is very slow for her."

Nicoletti has maintained a 3.79 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at Florida State University beginning 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.

Nicoletti joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Players of the Year Mikayla Boykin (2016-17, Clinton High School), Erin Whalen (2015-16, Providence Day School), Stephanie Watts (2014-15, Weddington High School), Jatarie White (2013-14 & 2012-13, Providence Day School), Tiffany Mitchell (2011-12, Providence Day School), Cierra Burdick (2010-11 & 2009-10, Butler High School), Asia Williams (2008-09, Hillside High School), Candace Wood (2007-08, Victory Christian Center School), and Cetera DeGraffenreid (2006-07, Smoky Mountain High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Izabela 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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