

**OLIVE BRANCH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (March 8, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Endya Buford of Olive Branch High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Buford is the second Gatorade Mississippi Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Olive Branch 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 Buford as Mississippi's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in March, Buford joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Maya Moore (2005-06, Collins Hill High School, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville High School, N.C.), Candace Parker (2001-02, 2002-03 & 2003-04, Naperville Central High School, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo High School, Calif.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis High School, Ind.), Katie Smith (1991-92, Logan High School, Ohio) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside High School, Calif.).

The 5-foot-7 junior guard had led the Conquistadors to a 27-4 record and a berth in the Class 5A state semifinals at the time of her selection. Buford averaged 26.3 points, 8.4 assists, 7.3 rebounds, 5.9 steals and 1.1 blocks through 31 games. A two-time All-State selection, Buford is a two-time Region 1-5A MVP. She entered the state semifinals with 1,749 career points.

Buford has volunteered locally as part of elementary school literacy-outreach programs and as a youth basketball coach and referee. "Endya Buford is an extension of her coach on the court and willfully leads her team on both the defensive and offensive sides of the ball," said Shunda Johnson, head coach of Marion (Ark.) High School. "She has great passing skills. With her ability to pass, she seems to be ahead of the plays and has the talent to distribute the ball to players in position to score."

Buford has maintained a B-plus average in the classroom and represents one of the state's top academic candidates in meeting the Gatorade award's broad criteria. She will begin her senior year of high school 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. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Buford joins Gatorade Mississippi Girls Basketball Players of the Year Destiny Haymer (2017-18, Holmes County Central High School), Myah Taylor (2016-17, 2015-16 & 2014-15, Olive Branch High School) and Victoria Vivians (2013-14 & 2011-12, Scott Central High School) as athletes who have won the basketball award.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Buford also has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of her choosing. She is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit [www.Gatorade.com/POY](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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