

NEW HANOVER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (May 23, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Blake Walston of New Hanover High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year**. Walston is the third Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year to be chosen from New Hanover 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 Walston as North Carolina's best high school baseball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Baseball Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Walston joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo High School, Mich.), Jon Lester (2001-02, Bellarmine Preparatory School, Wash.), David Price (2003-04, Blackman High School, Tenn.), Clayton Kershaw (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas), Rick Porcello (2006-2007, Seaton Hall Preparatory School, N.J.) and Kris Bryant (2009-10, Bonanza High School, Nev.).

The 6-foot-4, 175-pound senior left-handed pitcher and first baseman had led the Wildcats to a 24-1 record and a berth in the Class 3A East Regional championship series at the time of his selection. Walston owned an 11-0 record with a 0.23 earned run average and 120 strikeouts in 61.2 innings pitched through 25 games. He had surrendered just 23 hits and issued 17 walks. Walston, who led New Hanover to the 2018 Class 3A state title, carried a .405 batting average with four doubles, 23 runs scored, 16 runs batted in and a .461 on-base percentage into the regional title series.

Walston has volunteered locally with the Miracle League of Wilmington and the Special Olympics, and he has donated his time to multiple community service initiatives through his church youth group. "Walston is somebody who was dominant on the mound from start to finish," said Nick Raynor, head coach of Topsail High. "Even without his best stuff, he would find a way to pitch and get batters out. But his stuff was some of the best you will ever see at the high school level, especially from a southpaw."

Walston has maintained a weighted 3.72 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a national letter of intent to play baseball on scholarship at North Carolina State University this fall, but is projected as an early round selection in June's Major League Baseball draft.

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.

Walston joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Players of the Year Owen White (2017-18, Jesse Carson High School), MacKenzie Gore (2016-17, Whiteville High School), Logan Davidson (2015-16, Providence High School), Max Wotell (2014-15, Marvin Ridge High School), and Braxton Davidson (2013-14, T.C. Roberson) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Walston also has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of his choosing. He 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, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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