

## NESHOBA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MISSISSIPPI SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

**CHICAGO** (May 30, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Aspen Wesley of Neshoba Central High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year**. Wesley is the second Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Neshoba Central 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 Wesley as Mississippi's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Wesley joins an elite alumni association of past state softball award-winners, including Catherine Osterman (2000-01, Cy Spring High School, Texas), Kelsey Stewart (2009-10, Arkansas City High School, Kan.), Carley Hoover (2012-13 D.W. Daniel High School, S.C.), Jenna Lilley (2012-13, Hoover High School, Ohio), Morgan Zerkle (2012-13 Cabell Midland High School, W. Va.), and Rachel Garcia (2014-15, Highland High School, Calif.).

The state's three-time returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-3 senior right-handed pitcher and outfielder led the Rockets to a 33-2 record and a seventh-straight Class 5A state championship this past season. Wesley posted a 24-2 record in the circle with a 0.23 earned run average, striking out 335 batters and walking just 21 in 154 innings pitched. At the plate, Wesley batted .409 with four home runs, 36 RBI and a .624 slugging percentage. She concluded her prep softball career with 118 victories and 1,651 strikeouts.

A member of her school's Bible Club, Wesley has volunteered locally as a youth softball coach. "When Aspen is in the circle, she is the most focused player on either team," said Trae Embry, head coach of Neshoba Central High. "She is super-competitive and always believes she can make the pitch."

Wesley has maintained a 3.49 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a national letter of intent to play softball on scholarship at Mississippi 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. 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.

Four-time winner Wesley joins Gatorade Mississippi Softball Players of the Year Hailey Lunderman (2014-15, Neshoba Central High School) and Darby Bishop (2013-14, Newton County High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Wesley 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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