

## NORTHEAST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE FLORIDA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

**CHICAGO** (June 20, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Jan'Taijah Ford of Northeast High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Florida Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year**. Ford is the first Gatorade Florida Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Northeast 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 track, distinguishes Ford as Florida's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Ford joins an elite alumni association of state track & field award-winners, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-7 senior swept the 200- and 400-meter dash events at the 3A state meet, leading the Hurricanes to a third-place finish as a team. At the time of her selection, her personal-best 400 clocking of 51.57 seconds to capture gold at the Great Southwest Classic ranked No. 2 nationally among prep competitors in the event in 2019. Her PR in the 200 (23.30) ranked No. 6 and her PR in the 100 was No. 33 in the country.

A mentee with the Women of Tomorrow youth empowerment organization since 2017, Ford will become the first member of her family to graduate high school and attend college. A former quad-bike racer, she has volunteered on behalf of the Boys and Girls Club Summer Program, helping young people build self-esteem, develop leadership skills, enhance their potential, increase their physical activity and expand their cultural awareness. "When I think about Jan'Taijah, the first words that come to mind are perseverance, strength and determination," said Northeast High School co-head coach Duchane Thomas. "This young lady has preserved through social and economic challenges to become one of Florida's most decorated female athletes. Throughout that time, she has displayed impeccable personal qualities on and off the track. Ms. Ford is an exceptional and multi-talented person with a great character and superb work ethic."

Ford has maintained a state CUM GPA of 3.33 in the classroom and has signed a national letter of intent to compete on an athletic scholarship at the University of Southern California 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.

Ford joins recent Gatorade Florida Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Caitlin Collier (2017-18, The Bolles School), Symone Mason (2016-17, Miami Southridge Senior High School), Ka'Tia Seymour (2015-16, Palatka High School), Nicole Greene (2014-15, Ponte Vedra High School) and Kaylin Whitney (2013-14, East Ridge High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Ford 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](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](https://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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