

ROCKFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MICHIGAN GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 20, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Ericka VanderLende of Rockford High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Michigan Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year**. VanderLende is the first Gatorade Michigan Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Rockford 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 VanderLende as Michigan'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, VanderLende 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-10 senior won the 1600-meter run with a time of 4:41.00 and the 3200-meter run in 10:24.57 at the Division 1 state meet this past season. VanderLende also placed second in the 800. Her season-best time of 9:57.01 in the 3200 is fastest in state history and she won the two-mile at the Brooks PR Invitational in 9:53.00, which ranked as the nation's No. 1 performance among prep competitors in 2019 at the time of her selection.

VanderLende has participated in service-mission trips with her church to aid the underprivileged. "Ericka is an incredible runner who has accomplished some astonishing feats," said Rockford distance coach Ben Watson. "She is totally dedicated to becoming the best she can become." VanderLende has maintained a 4.07 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at the University of Michigan 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.

VanderLende joins recent Gatorade Michigan Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Grace Stark (2017-18, Lakeland High School), Anne Forsyth (2016-17, Pioneer High School), Brianna Holloway (2015-16, Oak Park High School), Annie Fuller (2014-15, Manistee High School) and Anna Jefferson (2013-14, Oak Park High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," VanderLende 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, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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