

## WOODWARD ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE® GEORGIA BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

**CHICAGO** (March 26, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Walker Kessler of Woodward Academy** as its **2019-20 Gatorade Georgia Boys Basketball Player of the Year**. Kessler is the first Gatorade Georgia Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Woodward Academy.

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 Kessler as Georgia's best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award, Kessler joins an elite alumni association of past state boys basketball award winners, including Karl-Anthony Towns (2012-13 & 2013-14, St. Joseph High School, N.J.), Dwight Howard (2003-04, Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.), Chris Bosh (2001-02, Lincoln High School, Texas), Paul Pierce (1994-95, Inglewood High School, Calif.), Chauncey Billups (1993-94 & 1994-95, George Washington High School, Colo.) and Jason Kidd (1991-92, St. Joseph Notre Dame High School, Calif.).

The 7-foot, 245-pound senior forward and center led the War Eagles to a 30-2 record and the Class AAAA state championship this past season. Kessler averaged 17.8 points, 9.3 assists, 5.2 blocks, 1.3 steals and 1.2 assists per game, and he tallied 17 points and nine boards in Woodward's win over Cross Creek High in the state final. A McDonald's All-American Game invitee, he concluded his prep basketball career with 2,001 points, 1,236 rebounds and 525 blocks.

A member of his local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Kessler has volunteered locally as a youth basketball coach, and he has donated his time to multiple community service initiatives through his church. "We have faced Walker seven times and each time I noticed improvement from the last time," said Jarrod Davis, head coach of Salem High. "I have seen such maturity and growth in him as a player."

Kessler has maintained a weighted 4.23 GPA in the classroom and represents one of the state's top academic candidates in meeting the Gatorade award's broad criteria. He has signed a national letter of intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of North Carolina this fall.

Kessler joins Gatorade Georgia Boys Basketball Players of the Year Sharife Cooper (2018-19, McEachern High School), Ashton Hagans, (2017-18, Newton High School), Wendell Carter (2016-17, Pace Academy), Alterique Gilbert (2015-16, Miller Grove High School), and Jaylen Brown (2014-15, Wheeler High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

The 2019-2020 Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year announcement has been temporarily postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. To ensure the safety of everyone involved, The Gatorade Company will follow the guidance of experts and health officials as it determines the appropriate time to announce this year's winner.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Kessler 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](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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