

**JOEL BARLOW HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 28, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Abby Ota of Joel Barlow High School as its 2019-20 Gatorade Connecticut Softball Player of the Year. Ota is the first Gatorade Connecticut Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Joel Barlow 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 Ota as Connecticut'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, Ota joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, 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 5-foot-3 junior shortstop batted .500 at the PGF Premier 18U Nationals last summer and was named a First Team All-American by Extra Inning Softball. Ota led the state in hitting with a .725 average for the Falcons (17-7) during the 2019 high school season, also scoring 44 runs and stealing 38 bases without being thrown out. She was a First Team All-State selection and ranks as the nation's No. 81 prospect in the Class of 2021 by Extra Inning Softball. Also a basketball standout, Ota has volunteered locally on behalf of youth softball programs and her school's Safe Rides program. "Abby is an absolute terror on offense," said Joel Barlow coach Craig Sears. "Everybody knows exactly what she's going to do, but she's hard to stop. She has incredible speed, but it's not just that—she has great baserunning ability, and she really knows how to play the game."

Ota has maintained a 3.11 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her senior year of high school 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 and 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.

Ota joins Gatorade Connecticut Softball Players of the Year Maria Hanchuk (2018-19, South Windsor High School), Becca Johnson (2017-18, Seymour High School), Abby Abramson (2016-17, Cheshire High School), Caroline Taber (2015-16, Fitch High School), and Caroline Taber (2014-15, Fitch High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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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