

**LA SALLE ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE RHODE ISLAND SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 28, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Kayla Baptista of La Salle Academy as its 2019-20 Gatorade Rhode Island Softball Player of the Year. Baptista is the first Gatorade Rhode Island Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from La Salle 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 Baptista as Rhode Island'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, Baptista 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-2 senior second baseman and outfielder was a two-time First Team All-State selection for the Rams, leading La Salle to the 2019 Division I state championship. As a standout for the Rhode Island Thunder ASA club team, Baptista compiled a .338 batting average and a .454 on-base percentage against elite-level national competition throughout last summer and fall. A 2019 Extra Inning First Team All-American, she batted .688 with 34 steals, 29 runs scored and a 1.104 slugging percentage as a junior for the Rams.

Baptista has volunteered locally serving meals to the homeless and as a youth softball coach. She has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through LaSallian Youth at her school. "As our leadoff hitter, Kayla gives 100 percent heart and effort no matter what," said Mo Jackson, head coach of La Salle Academy. "She is a player who never quits and is always looking for a challenge."

Baptista has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a national letter of intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of North Carolina.

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.

Baptista joins Gatorade Rhode Island Softball Players of the Year Haley Venturini (2018-19, Scituate High School), Ali Blanchard (2017-18, Moses Brown School), Kiara Oliver (2016-17 & 2015-16, North Kingstown High School), and Rachel Kantor (2014-15, North Kingstown 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](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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