

**PANTHER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 25, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Morgan Smalls of Panther Creek High School as its 2019-20 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Smalls is the second Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Panther Creek 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 Smalls as North Carolina'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, Smalls joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, 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 long jump, triple jump and high jump at the Class 4A indoor state championship meet this past winter. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Track and Field Athlete of the Year, Smalls recorded the nation's No. 1 prep indoor performances of 2020 with season-best marks of 6-0 in the high jump and 42-10 in the triple jump, while adding a U.S. No. 2 leap of 19-8 in the long jump. A 13-time state champion, she won a national prep championship in the high jump in 2019, both indoors and outdoors. Her career-best outdoor high jump of 6-2.25 ranks as the nation's No. 7 clearance in prep history while her indoor PR of 6-3.25 ranks No. 2 all-time.

Smalls has volunteered on behalf of her church community and participates in community service initiatives with Panther Creek Catamount LEAD student-athlete leaders' organization. She has also served as an advisor with the Black Student Association Club, helping to effect measurable improvements to the school environment, including helping to create an academic mentoring/tutoring program for African American students, assisting in the development of programs supporting students interested in creating their own business as well as facilitating discussions on how African American students can voice their opinions and create change within their school and community. "Morgan's athletic accomplishments speak for themselves," said Panther Creek High School coach Paul Scruggs. "I feel that she may be the best all-around jumper in U.S. prep history. She had the goal of winning an indoor national title in all three jumping events before indoor nationals were canceled due to the pandemic. She had also qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials and was going to compete for a spot on Team USA."

Smalls has maintained a weighted 3.79 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on scholarship at the University of Southern California.

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.

Two-time winner Smalls joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Veronica Fraley (2017-18, Wakefield High School), Tamara Clark (2016-17, High Point Central High School), Anna Cockrell (2015-16 & 2014-15, Providence Day School), and Sydnei Murphy (2013-14, Apex 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.