

**ALISO NIGUEL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CALIFORNIA VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 6, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Jessica Smith of Aliso Niguel High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade California Volleyball Player of the Year. Smith is the second Gatorade California Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Aliso Niguel 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 Smith as California's best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in May, Smith joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including USA Volleyball players Kayla Banwarth (2006-07, Wahlert High School, Iowa), Alisha Glass (2005-06, Leland Public High School, Mich.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View High School, Neb.) and Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas High School, Fla.).

The 6-foot senior outside hitter averaged 5.7 kills and 3.7 digs per set along with a .331 hitting percentage, leading the Wolverines to a 5-0 record during a pandemic-shortened season. A returning First Team All-State honoree, she was named 2020 AAU Beach Volleyball Player of the Year after winning her third consecutive junior national title. Smith was the South Coast League MVP as a junior and led her indoor club team to a 16U national championship in 2019.

Smith has volunteered locally on behalf of multiple food banks, the Special Olympics, a Challenger Basketball league supporting people with physical and intellectual challenges and a beach clean-up initiative. "Jessica Smith has a tremendous all-around package," said Mike Murphy, head coach at JSerra Catholic High. "She can pass, she plays all six rotations, she can swing with power—in big moments, she's the girl you want to set. She is tremendous under pressure, one of the coolest cats I've seen."

Smith has maintained a 4.36 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play beach volleyball on scholarship at UCLA 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. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which works with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Smith joins recent Gatorade California Volleyball Players of the Year Mia Tuaniga (2019-20, Mater Dei High School), Natalie Berty (2018-19, Mater Dei High School), Devon Chang (2017-18, Santa Margarita Catholic High School), and Lexi Sun (2016-17, Santa Fe Christian Schools), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Smith has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Smith is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization they chose is deserving of one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants, which will be announced throughout the year. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$2.7 million across 1,117 organizations.

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 playeroftheyear.gatorade.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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