

**BEDFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW HAMPSHIRE 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 Caleigh O'Connell of Bedford High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade New Hampshire Volleyball Player of the Year. O'Connell is the first Gatorade New Hampshire Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Bedford 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 O'Connell as New Hampshire'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, O'Connell 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 5-foot-11 junior setter led the Bulldogs to a 13-0 record and the Division I state championship this past season. O'Connell compiled 396 assists, 82 digs, 52 kills, 38 service aces and 28 blocks while posting a kill percentage of .515. A two-time Division I First Team All-State selection, she concluded her junior year with a school-record 1,319 assists in her prep volleyball career.

O'Connell has volunteered locally with the Animal Rescue League of New Hampshire and as an elementary school teaching assistant. "Caleigh hits well and hard, but what made her truly good is her court vision," said Jonathan Flower, head coach of Concord High. "Caleigh could read our defensive schemes in mid-play and respond to them. Her control allowed her to place the ball where she wanted to with a variety of tempos."

O'Connell has maintained a weighted 4.29 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 & 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.

O'Connell joins recent Gatorade New Hampshire Volleyball Players of the Year Kara Kelliher (2019-20, Nashua South High School), Leah Creteau (2018-19, Spaulding High School), Maddie Norris (2017-18, Hollis-Brookline High School), and Lauren Hatch (2016-17, Concord High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," O'Connell has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. O'Connell 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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