

**NORTH RALEIGH CHRISTIAN ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Riley Buckley of North Raleigh Christian Academy as its 2020-21 Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Player of the Year. Buckley is the first Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from North Raleigh Christian 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 Buckley as North Carolina'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, Buckley 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 junior setter, right-side hitter and middle blocker led the Knights to a 17-1 record and the North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association Class 4A state championship this past season. Buckley compiled 235 assists, 151 digs, 136 kills and 24 service aces while posting a kill percentage of .571 and a hitting percentage of .500. A two-time PrepVolleyball.com All-American selection, she concluded her junior year with 1,248 assists, 727 kills and 672 digs in her prep volleyball career.

Buckley has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through her school. She has also donated her time as a youth volleyball coach. "Riley is the leader and backbone of the North Raleigh team," said Malcolm Deans, head coach of Wake Christian Academy. "She has a huge impact on all the girls around her and is extremely versatile in both setting and hitting."

Buckley has maintained a weighted 4.08 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play volleyball on scholarship at the University of Missouri beginning in the fall of 2022.

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.

Buckley joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Players of the Year Jade Demps (2019-20, Broughton High School), Sydney Dowler (2018-19, Green Hope High School), Taylor Rowland (2017-18 & 2016-17, Cox Mill High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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