

**ESSEX HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE VERMONT 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 Molly Ardren of Essex High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Vermont Volleyball Player of the Year. Ardren is the third Gatorade Vermont Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Essex 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 Ardren as Vermont’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, Ardren 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 senior setter led the Hornets to a 9-0 record and the Chittenden County Tournament championship this past season. Playing outdoors due to pandemic restrictions, Ardren compiled 141 assists, 36 service aces, 22 kills and 15 digs. A two-time First Team All-State selection, Ardren is also team MVP for the Fusion Volleyball club team.

A member of her school’s student government, Ardren has volunteered locally as a youth volleyball coach and on behalf of blood-donation drives to benefit the American Red Cross. “Molly is one of the hardest-working athletes I have ever coached,” said Jen Liguori, head coach of Essex High School. “She is the kind of player that every coach would love to have on their team. Her work ethic, talent and leadership are unparalleled.”

Ardren has maintained an unweighted 4.02 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to attend Vassar College, where she will play volleyball, 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.

Ardren joins recent Gatorade Vermont Volleyball Players of the Year Syrah Wright (2019-20, Mount Mansfield Union High School), Maddie Folsom (2018-19, Essex High School), and Charlotte Frivoll (2017-18, Essex High School), among the state’s list of former award winners.

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