

**BISHOP MIEGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (May 27, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Payton Verhulst of Bishop Miege High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Kansas Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Verhulst is the second Gatorade Kansas Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Bishop Miege 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 Verhulst as Kansas's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Verhulst joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Skylar Diggins-Smith (2008-09, Washington High School, Ind.), Nneka Ogwumike (2007-08, Cy-Fair High School, Texas), Maya Moore (2006-07, Collins Hill High School, Ga.), Candace Parker (2002-03 & 2003-04, Naperville Central High School, Ill.), and Lisa Leslie (1989-90, Morningside High School, Calif.).

The 6-foot-1 senior guard led the Stags to a 23-1 record and the Class 4A state championship this past season. The state's returning Gatorade Girls Basketball Player of the Year, Verhulst averaged 20.0 points, 7.2 rebounds, 3.8 steals, 3.6 assists and 3.5 blocks per game. A McDonald's All-American, she was also the Sports in Kansas All-Class Player of the Year and was selected to the WBCA High School Coaches' All-America team. Verhulst also earned a roster spot on the 2021 USA Women's U19 World Cup Team. She is the nation's No. 12 prospect in her class as rated by ESPN.

Also a volleyball standout, Verhulst has volunteered locally on behalf of the Salvation Army, a food bank and youth sports programs. "Payton Verhulst is by far the best player we've faced," said Matthew Schulman, head coach at Blue Valley Northwest High. "No one impacts the game like her. She's a phenomenal athlete, an incredible basketball player and a very nice person too."

Verhulst has maintained a 3.67 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of Louisville 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.

Two-time winner Verhulst joins Gatorade Kansas Girls Basketball Players of the Year Kennedy Brown (2018-19, Derby High School), Emily Ryan (2017-18, Central Plains High School), and Taylor Robertson (2016-17, McPherson High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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