

**MAGNOLIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ARKANSAS BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 4, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Derrian Ford of Magnolia High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Arkansas Boys Basketball Player of the Year. Ford is the first Gatorade Arkansas Boys Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Magnolia 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 Ford as Arkansas' best high school boys basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Ford joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Jayson Tatum (2015-16, Chaminade College Preparatory School, Mo.), Karl-Anthony Towns (2012-13 & 2013-14, St. Joseph High School, N.J.), Jabari Parker (2011-12, Simeon Career Academy, Ill.) and Dwight Howard (2003-04, Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy, Ga.).

The 6-foot-4, 200-pound junior guard led the Panthers to a 23-1 record and the Class 4A semifinals this past season. Ford averaged 23.2 points, 7.1 rebounds and 3.0 assists. The Class 4A Player of the Year, he was also a First Team All-Arkansas Preps selection. Also the Class 4A State Tournament MVP as a freshman and sophomore, he is ranked as the nation's No. 42 prospect in the Class of 2022 by ESPN.

A devoted member of his church community, Ford has served as an elementary school mentor and has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics and the Make-a-Wish Foundation. "Derrian Ford is a physically imposing player with a great work ethic," said Paul Biancardi, ESPN National Recruiting Director. "He combines a unique blend of strength, speed and skill to score. His finishing ability against 'help defenders' is fantastic. His ability to play off of two feet in the paint with control, balance and explosiveness is special."

Ford has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his 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.

Ford joins recent Gatorade Arkansas Boys Basketball Players of the Year Jaylin Williams (2019-20, Northside High School), Issac McBride (2018-19, Baptist Prep), Isaiah Joe (2017-18, Northside High School), and Daniel Gafford (2016-17, El Dorado High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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