

**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 15, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Grace O'Keefe of St. Thomas Aquinas High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Player of the Year. O'Keefe is the fourth Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Thomas Aquinas 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'Keefe as Kansas best high school girls soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, O'Keefe joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Alexi Lalas (1987-88, Cranbrook High School, Mich.), Steve Cherundolo (1996-97, Mt. Carmel High School, Calif.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.), Heather O'Reilly (2001-02 & 2002-03, East Brunswick High School, N.J.), Matt Besler (2004-05, Blue Valley West High School, Kans.), Jack Harrison (2013-14, Berkshire High School, Mass.) and Mallory Pugh (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.).

The 5-foot-8 senior midfielder and forward led the Saints to a 17-4 record and the Class 5A state championship this past season. O'Keefe scored 13 goals and passed for 12 assists and scored her team's lone goal in what was ultimately a 2-1 shootout win over Blue Valley Southwest High in the state final. The Eastern Kansas League Forward of the Year, O'Keefe was a 2020 United Soccer Coaches High School All-American selection. She concluded her prep soccer career with 48 goals and 22 assists.

O'Keefe earned the Presidential Service Award for contributing more than 100 hours of service at Aquinas. She has volunteered locally as a peer tutor and as a youth soccer coach, and she has donated her time to the St. Thomas Aquinas STEM summer camp for kids. "Grace O'Keefe is a complete player," said Bryan Turner, head coach of Blue Valley North High. "She has speed, quickness and the ability to create her own shot."

O'Keefe has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Missouri State University 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'Keefe joins recent Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Players of the Year Sophia Stram (2019-20, Bishop Miege High School), Marissa Popoola (2018-19, Blue Valley West High School), and Gracely Briley (2017-18 & 2016-17, Blue Valley Southwest High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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