

**GULFPORT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI 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 Kate Smith of Gulfport High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Player of the Year. Smith is the second Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Gulfport 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 Smith as Mississippi's 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, Smith 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-4 junior forward scored 35 goals and passed for 17 assists this past season, leading the Admirals (22-1-2) to the Class 6A state championship. The two-time Sun Herald South Mississippi Player of the Year, Smith was also an All-State honoree and was a United Soccer Coaches All-American in 2020.

A devoted member of her church youth group, Smith has volunteered locally on behalf of a food bank, coastal clean-up initiatives and youth soccer camps. "Kate Smith is an incredible player who immediately stands out as soon as the game begins," said Maggie Daniels, head coach at Hancock High. "She plays hard and she's competitive, but she always plays with class."

Smith has maintained a 3.83 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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.

Smith joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Girls Soccer Players of the Year Lucy Green (2019-20, West Lauderdale High School), Morgan O'Connor (2018-19 & 2016-17, Oxford High School), and Tay Collum (2017-18, Northwest Rankin High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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

###