

**LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 Rylee Howard of Lafayette High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Missouri Girls Soccer Player of the Year. Howard is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from Lafayette 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 Howard as Missouri'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, Howard 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 41 goals and passed for 12 assists this past season, leading the Lancers (18-6) to the Class 4 state tournament. Howard recorded 11 multi-goal games, including eight hat tricks. She participated in a virtual training camp with the U.S. Soccer Under-18 Women's National Team earlier this spring and is ranked as the nation's No. 62 prospect in the Class of 2022 by TopDrawerSoccer.com. She concluded her junior year with 71 goals and 22 assists in her prep soccer career.

Howard has volunteered locally with SPENSA, a special-needs soccer association, and she has donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her club soccer program. "I have never seen a more dynamic offensive-type player on the women's side," said Eric Hill, head coach of Rockwood Summit High. "She is just as fast with the ball at her feet as our fastest girl without a ball at her feet. Rylee has a great penchant for going and finding the game and being a part of each play."

Howard has maintained a weighted 3.83 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play soccer on scholarship at the University of Wisconsin beginning in the fall of 2022.

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.

Howard joins recent Gatorade Missouri Girls Soccer Players of the Year Grace Bindbeutel (2019-20, St. Dominic High School), Lily Farkas (2018-19, St. Teresa's Academy), Anna Lawler (2017-18, Rockwood Summit High School), and Kirsten Davis (2016-17, Westminster Christian Academy), among the state's list of former award winners.

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