

**FORT MYERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE FLORIDA SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 18, 2021) — In its 36<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Julia Knowler of Fort Myers High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Florida Softball Player of the Year**. Knowler is the first Gatorade Florida Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Fort Myers 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 Knowler as Florida's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Knowler joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Cat Osterman (2000-01, Cy Spring High School, Texas), Kelsey Stewart (2009-10, Arkansas City High School, Kan.), Carley Hoover (2012-13, D.W. Daniel High School, S.C.), Jenna Lilley (2012-13, Hoover High School, Ohio), Morgan Zerkle (2012-13, Cabell Midland High School, W. Va.), and Rachel Garcia (2014-15, Highland High School, Calif.).

The 5-foot-9 sophomore right-handed pitcher and infielder led the Green Wave to a 20-6-1 record and the Class 5A state championship this past season. Knowler compiled a 12-2 mark in the circle with a 1.46 earned run average, striking out 117 batters against just 15 walks in 96 innings pitched. The Class 5A Player of the Year, she posted a .582 batting average with eight home runs, 39 runs scored, 35 runs batted in and a 1.268 slugging percentage.

Knowler has volunteered locally as an assistant with a youth after-school program. She has also donated her time as a youth softball coach. "Julia is a dedicated, hard-working and talented ballplayer," said Johnny Manetta, head coach of Fort Myers High. "She has the ability to take control of the game at any time whether it is on the mound, in the field or from the plate."

Knowler has maintained a weighted 4.15 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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.

Knowler joins recent Gatorade Florida Softball Players of the Year Avery Goelz (2019-20, Lakewood Ranch High School), Lexi Kilfoyl (2018-19 & 2017-18, Academy at the Lakes), and Ally Muraskin (2016-17, Coral Springs Charter School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Knowler has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Knowler 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com), on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/Gatorade](https://twitter.com/Gatorade).

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