

**MARIST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 18, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Abby Dunning of Marist High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year**. Dunning is the first Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Marist 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 Dunning as Illinois best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Dunning 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-4 senior right-handed pitcher had led the RedHawks to a 36-1 record and a berth in the Class 4A state semifinals at the time of her selection. Dunning owned a 26-1 mark with a 0.28 earned run average in the circle through 37 games, firing seven no-hitters including two perfect games. In 149 innings pitched, Dunning had allowed just 33 hits and 28 walks while amassing 317 strikeouts. She is ranked as the nation's No. 47 recruit in the Class of 2021 by Extra Inning Softball.

A three-year student ambassador at Marist High, Dunning has volunteered locally on behalf of fundraising campaigns to benefit cancer research and the Special Olympics. She has also donated her time as a peer math and Spanish tutor, and as a youth pitching coach. "Abby has had a terrific year," said Perry Peterson, head coach of Barrington High. "She is so composed for a senior with amazing talents of both speed and movement on the pitching mound."

Dunning has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Boston College 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.

Dunning joins recent Gatorade Illinois Softball Players of the Year Bailey Dowling (2019-20, 2018-19, & 2017-18, St. Joseph-Ogden High School), and Chardonnay Harris (2016-17, Oak Park and River Forest High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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