

**TOPEKA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS 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 **Nija Canady of Topeka High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Kansas Softball Player of the Year**. Canady is the first Gatorade Kansas Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Topeka 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 Canady as Kansas best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Canady 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 6-foot junior right-handed pitcher and infielder led the Trojans to a 25-0 record and the Class 6A state championship this past season. Canady compiled a 21-0 record in the circle with a 0.26 earned run average, allowing just 37 hits while striking out 232 batters in 109.1 innings pitched. Ranked as the nation's No. 19 recruit in the Class of 2022 by Extra Inning Softball, she allowed just two unearned runs on seven hits in four postseason games, firing a 1-hitter with 16 strikeouts in Topeka's 7-1 win over Olathe North High in the state final. At the plate, she batted .515 with 16 home runs, 59 runs batted in and a 1.364 slugging percentage.

A member of the Topeka High student council, Canady is the Junior Class President. She has volunteered locally at homeless shelters and nursing homes, and she has donated her time as a youth basketball coach. "Nija is truly a special player," said Jim Huecker, Canady's head coach of the Louisville Lady Sluggers ASA team. "She is a product of hard work, dedication and a relentless pursuit of excellence."

Canady has maintained a weighted 4.46 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.

Canady joins recent Gatorade Kansas Softball Players of the Year Tatum Clopton (2019-20 & 2018-19, Lawrence Free State High School), Lauren Mills (2017-18, Seaman High School), and Mady Young (2016-17, Olathe Northwest High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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