

**NORTH BUNCOMBE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 **Karlyn Pickens of North Buncombe High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade North Carolina Softball Player of the Year**. Pickens is the first Gatorade North Carolina Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from North Buncombe 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 Pickens as North Carolina'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, Pickens 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 led the Blackhawks (15-1) to the Class 3A state semifinals this past season. Pickens posted a 12-1 record with a 0.41 ERA, allowing just 12 hits and 21 walks in 85 innings pitched, while striking out 207 batters. The Western Mountain Athletic Conference Pitcher of the Year, she also batted .519 with five home runs, 16 RBI and an OPS of 1.949. Pickens is ranked as the nation's No. 6 prospect in the Class of 2022 by Extra Inning Softball and was selected to play in the Premier Girls Fastpitch Futures All-American Game in July.

Also a basketball and volleyball standout, Pickens has volunteered locally as a mentor for youth softball players. "Karlyn Pickens is an amazing talent," said Jimmy Greene, head coach at West Rowan High. "She has outstanding athleticism for a pitcher, which makes her a triple threat—she can pitch, hit and run the bases. She's probably the fastest pitcher we have ever faced, but her screwball also kept us at bay and she throws an effective rise ball and change-up too. I'm in awe of her ability."

Pickens has maintained a weighted 4.18 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.

Pickens joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Softball Players of the Year Kenna Raye Dark (2019-20, Eastern Alamance High School), Jordan Hatch (2018-19, West Stanly High School), Abby Settlemire (2017-18, Fred T. Foard High School), and Mia Davidson (2016-17, Orange High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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