

**GARFIELD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WASHINGTON 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 **Nicola Simpson of Garfield High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Washington Softball Player of the Year**. Simpson is the first Gatorade Washington Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Garfield 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 Simpson as Washington'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, Simpson 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-8 senior pitcher and first baseman led the Bulldogs to a 6-3 record this past season. Simpson compiled a 6-2 record in the circle with a 0.44 earned run average, allowing just six hits to go with 135 strikeouts in 47.2 innings pitched. She tossed five no-hitters and recorded 93 percent of her outs via strikeout. At the plate, the PGF All-American selection batted .778 with six doubles, 13 runs scored, 15 runs batted in, posting a .867 on-base percentage and a 1.444 slugging percentage. She was invited to try out for the Canadian Junior National Team in May, but the camp was postponed because of pandemic concerns.

An award-winning viola player, Simpson has volunteered locally as a Spanish teaching assistant and as a youth softball coach. She has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church. "The thing that makes Nicola so special is her competitiveness," said Ron Zahn, head coach of Roosevelt High. "She pitches with a ton of energy and emotion. When you face her, you know she is coming at you with every pitch. She is one of the few pitchers that moves and spins the ball very well within the strike zone. She hits her spots consistently, which makes her almost impossible to hit."

Simpson has maintained a 3.91 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of Tennessee 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.

Simpson joins recent Gatorade Washington Softball Players of the Year Raigan Barrett (2019-20, Rogers High School), Iyanla De Jesus (2018-19, Jackson High School), Brooke Nelson (2017-18, Bonney Lake High School), and Taylor Rhinehart (2016-17, Woodinville High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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