

**BLUE VALLEY SOUTHWEST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 29, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Ben Kudrna of Blue Valley Southwest High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Kansas Baseball Player of the Year**. Kudrna is the first Gatorade Kansas Baseball Player of the Year to be chosen from Blue Valley Southwest 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 Kudrna as Kansas best high school baseball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Baseball Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Kudrna joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo High School, Mich.), Jon Lester (2001-02, Bellarmine Preparatory School, Wash.), David Price (2003-04, Blackman High School, Tenn.), Clayton Kershaw (2005-06, Highland Park High School, Texas), Rick Porcello (2006-2007, Seaton Hall Preparatory School, N.J.) and Kris Bryant (2009-10, Bonanza High School, Nev.).

The 6-foot-4, 210-pound senior right-handed pitcher led the Timberwolves to a 22-3 record, the Class 5A state championship and the No. 43 national ranking by Perfect Game USA this past season. The 2021 Class 5A Pitcher of the Year, Kudrna compiled a 9-1 record on the mound with a 0.99 ERA and 100 strikeouts against just 11 walks in 57.1 innings. He also fired three shutouts, posted a WHIP of 0.67 and limited opponents to a .130 batting average. He did not allow an earned run in 12 postseason innings-pitched, striking out 18 in that span.

A member of his BVSWS's WolfPack Crew, which plans and executes school assemblies, Kudrna has volunteered locally at a food pantry. He has also served as a supervisor for area baseball fields, where he's been a role model and mentor to youth players. "Kudrna is a stud ballplayer with big-time stuff," said Michael Dudley, head coach at Blue Valley North. "He has the best arm we've seen in a while. He's got 'pitchability,' meaning he's not just a thrower. He seemed to elevate his team's play whenever he was on the mound. There aren't many better prep arms out there in the country. I would say he's very worthy of the award."

Kudrna has maintained a 3.50 weighted GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to play baseball on scholarship at Louisiana State University this fall, but is projected as an early round selection in July's Major League Baseball draft.

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.

Kudrna joins recent Gatorade Kansas Baseball Players of the Year Jace Kaminska (2019-20 & 2018-19, Caney Valley High School), Peyton Carson (2017-18, Shawnee Heights High School), and Conner VanCleave (2016-17, Holcomb High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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