

**MADISON RIDGELAND ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (July 2, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Kennedi Sanders of Madison Ridgeland Academy** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Sanders is the first Gatorade Mississippi Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Madison Ridgeland Academy.

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 Sanders as Mississippi's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Sanders joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-6 junior broke the tape in the 200- and 400-meter dash at the State Mississippi Track & Field of Champions this past season after sweeping the 100, 200 and 400 at the MAIS Overall State Championships and leading the Jaguars to the MAIS 5A team title. Also the bronze medalist in the 100 at both the 2021 adidas Boost Boston Games and the NSAF USA Meet of Champions, Sanders' wind-aided, personal-best in the 200 of 23.05 seconds was the nation's No. 2 all-conditions time among 2021 prep competitors at the time of her selection. Additionally, her season-best time of 11.36 in the 100 ranked No. 6. She enters her senior year as the owner of the No. 1 400 clocking (53.19) in state high school history according to MileSplit.com, a time that also ranked No. 6 nationally in 2021.

A member of the Youth Restoration Community Church, Sanders has served on behalf of its youth ministry, assisting adolescents. She has also volunteered with the church community's Youth Initiative, feeding families on holidays and assisting with backpack giveaways to children in need. This spring, she organized track clinics for local elementary and middle school girls. "Kennedi is an exceptional sprinter with lots of natural, God-given talent," said Madison Ridgeland Academy head coach Melanie Black. "However, unlike so many other gifted athletes who are content to rest on their talent, Kennedi is very dedicated and committed to getting better every day. She trains year-round on the track and in the gym and is laser-focused on running in college and beyond. Her strong work ethic and great attitude are an inspiration to her fellow teammates and spur them to train harder."

Sanders has maintained a 3.47 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.

Sanders joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Brooklyn Biancamano (2019-20 & 2018-19, Long Beach High School), Asia Poe (2017-18, Madison Central High School), and Demi Washington (2016-17, Clinton High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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