

**CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO 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 **Ku'upualiliapihamekealoha "Lia" Pili of Centennial High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Pili is the first Gatorade New Mexico Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from **Centennial 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 Pili as New Mexico'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, Pili 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-10 senior swept the shot put and discus throws at the Class 5A state meet this past season, leading the Hawks to sixth place as a team. Pili's personal-best effort of 45 feet, 8 inches in the shot put this spring ranked as the nation's No. 40 throw among 2021 prep girls competitors. She also launched career-record throws in the discus (139-10) and javelin (112-10) and graduated with the state's No. 3 shot put distance and the No. 1 (tie) discus throw in prep girls track history.

An appointed youth elder in her church for two years, Pili planned lessons and activities for the girls under her charge. Commonly called "Lia," she also served as part of a humanitarian youth group for several weeks while building a preschool in Yucatan, Mexico. Pili has also donated her time at a charity clothing store, an elderly home for Alzheimer's patients and founded an anonymous teen service group named P2SA (Proud 2 Stand Alone), helping area families in need and raising awareness for suicide prevention. "Lia is a first-class person," said Centennial High throwing coach Aaron Ocampo. "She's an excellent student and very passionate about working to be the best thrower she can be. Though she was already very good at throwing when she came to us, she is highly coachable, as evidenced by the fact she owns the No. 10 javelin throw in the state this spring despite having just taken up the apparatus. I've been coaching football and throwers for over 20 years and Lia is at the top of my list of people/athletes that I have coached."

Pili has maintained a 3.94 unweighted GPA in the classroom. She remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Pili joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Adriana Tatum (2019-20 & 2018-19, Sandia High School), and Haley Rizek (2017-18 & 2016-17, St. Pius X High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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