

**HARDING UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 **Akala Garrett of Harding University High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Garrett is the second Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Harding University 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 Garrett as North Carolina'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, Garrett 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 sophomore was the Most Outstanding Performer at the Class 4A state meet, winning the 100-meter high hurdles in 13.90 seconds and capturing the 300-meter intermediate hurdles in 41.64, leading the Rams to third place as a team. Garrett also ran the second leg on Harding's victorious 4x200 relay quartet. Her season-best time of 58.05 in the 400 hurdles ranks as the nation's No. 1 performance among 2021 prep girls competitors. Garrett has also clocked the nation's No. 3 time in the 300 hurdles (41.23) and is ranked No. 7 in the 100 hurdles with a time of 13.43.

Garrett has volunteered locally on behalf of youth track programs. "Akala can run any event from the 800 down, but she's in love with the hurdles," said Harding coach LaSonja Collins. "Since 2017, she has slowly progressed into a top national athlete, but she is very humble and always puts the team first."

Garrett has maintained a 3.38 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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.

Garrett joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Morgan Smalls (2019-20 & 2018-19, Panther Creek High School), Veronica Fraley (2017-18, Wakefield High School), and Tamara Clark (2016-17, High Point Central High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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

###