

**NAZARETH ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 11, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Katie Hurta** of **Nazareth Academy** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Player of the Year**. Hurta is the first Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Nazareth 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 court, distinguishes Hurta as Illinois' best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Hurta joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners, including USA Volleyball players Kayla Banwarth (2006-07, Wahlert High School, Iowa), Alisha Glass (2005-06, Leland Public High School, Mich.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View High School, Neb.) and Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas High School, Fla.).

The 6-foot-1 senior setter and right-side hitter led the Roadrunners to a 30-7 record and the Class 3A state championship this past season. Hurta compiled 415 kills with a .531 kill percentage and a .450 hitting percentage, including 15 kills in Nazareth's 2-1 win over Belvidere North High School in the state final. Hurta also tallied 360 assists, 198 digs, 30 blocks and 22 service aces. A 2021 American Volleyball Coaches Association First Team All-American selection, Hurta was the ILLPrepvb.com Player of the Year as well. She concluded her prep volleyball career with 1,011 kills, 578 assists and 527 digs.

Hurta has volunteered locally as a peer tutor and youth volleyball coach and referee, and she has donated her time making meals and cookies for families at the area Ronald McDonald House. "Katie is an extremely physical player and well-rounded," said Mallory Thelander, head coach of Loyola Academy. "She is able to run the court at the setting position but can also hit the ball very aggressively and even pass in the back row."

Hurta has maintained a weighted 4.35 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play volleyball on scholarship at Indiana University 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 leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Hurta joins recent Gatorade Illinois Volleyball Players of the Year Rachel Muisenga (2020-21, Benet Academy), Lexi Rodriguez (2019-20, Sterling High School), Taylor Landfair (2018-19, Plainfield Central High School), and Mica Allison (2017-18, The High School of Saint Thomas More), among the state's list of former award winners.

Gatorade has a long-standing history of serving athlete communities and understands how sports instill valuable lifelong skills on and off the field. Through Gatorade's "Play it Forward" platform, Hurta has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national organization of their choosing that helps young athletes realize the benefits of playing sports. Hurta is also eligible to submit a short 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 \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 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 or follow us on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY, Instagram at instagram.com/Gatorade and Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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