

**NORTH RALEIGH CHRISTIAN ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 11, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Riley Buckley** of **North Raleigh Christian Academy** is the **2021-22 Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Player of the Year**. Buckley is the first Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from North Raleigh Christian 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 Buckley as North Carolina's best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Buckley 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 6-foot-1 senior setter, right-side hitter and middle blocker led the Knights to a 27-2 record and the North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association Class 4A state championship this past season. Buckley compiled 641 assists, 230 digs, 213 kills, 30 blocks and 27 service aces while posting a kill percentage of .642 and a hitting percentage of .605. A two-time PrepVolleyball.com All-American selection, she concluded her prep volleyball career with 1,889 assists, 940 kills and 902 digs.

Buckley has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through her school. She has also donated her time as a youth volleyball coach. "Riley had fewer dominant hitters, therefore she had to become not only a more consistent, smarter setter, but also an offensive threat," said Malcolm Deans, head coach of Wake Christian Academy. "As a coach, I tried to strategically plan for Riley's offensive threat, but with very little success."

Buckley has maintained a weighted 4.27 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play volleyball on scholarship at the University of Missouri 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.

Two-time winner Buckley joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Volleyball Players of the Year Jade Demps (2019-20, Broughton High School), Sydney Dowler (2018-19, Green Hope High School), and Taylor Rowland (2017-18 & 2016-17, Cox Mill High School), 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, Buckley 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. Buckley 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY), Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade) and Twitter at [twitter.com/Gatorade](https://twitter.com/Gatorade).

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