

**ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 9, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Mackenzie Nelson** of **St. Luke's School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Connecticut Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Nelson is the first Gatorade Connecticut Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Luke's 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 court, distinguishes Nelson as Connecticut's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award to be announced in March, Nelson joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Skylar Diggins-Smith (2008-09, Washington High School, Ind.), Nneka Ogumike (2007-08, CyFair High School, Texas), Maya Moore (2006-07, Collins Hill High School, Ga.), Candace Parker (2002-03 & 2003-04, Naperville Central High School, Ill.), and Lisa Leslie (1989-90, Morningside High School, Calif.).

The 5-foot-9 junior guard led the Storm to a 26-1 record, with the only loss coming in the New England Preparatory Athletic Council championship game. Nelson exploded for 45 points as St. Luke's lost to undefeated Brooks (Mass.), 76-75, in overtime. On the season, Nelson averaged 22 points, 4.5 rebounds, 3.5 assists and 5 steals per game.

Nelson has volunteered locally on behalf of multiple basketball camps, including a Boy Scouts camp as well as the High Rise Basketball Summer Camp. She also has donated her time to several school community service initiatives. "Mack is an all-around player that changes the game the moment she steps on the floor," said Jenn Harris, Greens Farms Academy head coach. "I haven't seen her not be 'on' because it doesn't feel like she is ever turned off. She is able to hit from the outside, pick defenses apart with her ability to drive the lane, has amazing vision of the floor and is pretty hands-on defensively. She is able to pick your pocket regularly, and read passes for a steal."

Nelson has maintained a 3.84 GPA in the classroom and 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 leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Nelson joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Girls Basketball Players of the Year Shailyn Pinkney (2020-21, East Hartford High School), Allie Palmieri (2019-20, Greens Farms Academy), Makenzie Helms (2018-19, East Haven High School), and Bella Santoro (2017-18, Mercy 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 court. Through Gatorade's "Play it Forward" platform, Nelson 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. Nelson 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.