

**HOPKINS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MINNESOTA GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (March 9, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Maya Nnaji** of **Hopkins High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Minnesota Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Nnaji is the second Gatorade Minnesota Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Hopkins 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 court, distinguishes Nnaji as Minnesota'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, Nnaji joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Skylar Diggins-Smith (2008-09, Washington High School, Ind.), Nneka Ogwumike (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 6-foot-4 senior forward had led the Royals to a 21-1 record and a berth in the sectional semifinals at the time of her selection. Nnaji averaged 18.7 points, 7.5 rebounds and 1.3 steals through 22 games. The Star Tribune Player of the Year as a junior, she is a three-time All-State honoree and a 2022 McDonald's All-American. She's ranked as the nation's No. 4 prospect in the Class of 2022 by Prospects Nation.

Nnaji has organized a group called Silent Strength that creates care packages for the homeless and has volunteered extensively with the Nnaji Family Foundation, which assists Nigerian families in need. "Maya Nnaji is a high-level player who is very tough to stop," said Kent Hamre, head coach at St. Michael-Albertville High School. "Her strength and size always make her a difficult matchup."

Nnaji has maintained a 3.99 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at the University of Arizona 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.

Nnaji joins recent Gatorade Minnesota Girls Basketball Players of the Year Gianna Kneepkens (2020-21, Marshall School), and Paige Bueckers (2019-20, 2018-19, & 2017-18, Hopkins 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, Nnaji 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. Nnaji 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).