

**BENTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ARKANSAS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 9, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Alyssa Houston** of **Benton High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Arkansas Softball Player of the Year**. Houston is the first Gatorade Arkansas Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Benton 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 Houston as Arkansas' best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Houston joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Cat Osterman (2000-01, Cy Spring High School, Texas), Kelsey Stewart (2009-10, Arkansas City High School, Kan.), Carley Hoover (2012-13, D.W. Daniel High School, S.C.), Jenna Lilley (2012-13, Hoover High School, Ohio), Morgan Zerkle (2012-13, Cabell Midland High School, W. Va.), and Rachel Garcia (2014-15, Highland High School, Calif.).

The 5-foot-10 junior right-handed pitcher and third baseman led the Panthers to a 34-0 record and the Class 5A state championship this past season. Houston compiled a 14-0 record in the circle with a 0.49 earned run average, and she threw four innings of hitless relief with 10 strikeouts as Benton rallied for a 3-2 win over Green County Tech in the state final. On the season, Houston struck out 175 batters while allowing just 22 hits in 85.1 innings pitched. Ranked as the nation's No. 36 recruit in the Class of 2023 by Extra Inning Softball, she compiled a .407 batting average with 11 home runs, 34 runs batted in, a .864 slugging percentage and 26 runs scored.

Houston has volunteered locally with Miracle League Benton, which teaches the game of baseball to children with disabilities. She has also donated her time as a youth softball coach. "Alyssa is an unbelievable talent," said David Reynolds, head coach of Greene County Tech. "She covers every bit of the plate and does it with power to all fields. She is the best hitter I have seen in two years and she was the best we have seen [in the circle], too."

Houston has maintained a weighted 4.06 GPA in the classroom. She 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.

Houston joins recent Gatorade Arkansas Softball Players of the Year Emily Perry (2020-21, Bentonville High School), Hallie Wacaser (2019-20 & 2017-18, Bentonville West High School), and Joley Mitchell (2018-19, Rose Bud 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, Houston 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. Houston 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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