

**TOPEKA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE KANSAS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 9, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Nija Canady** of **Topeka High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Kansas Softball Player of the Year**. Canady is the first Gatorade Kansas Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Topeka 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 Canady as Kansas' best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Canady 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 6-foot senior right-handed pitcher and infielder led the Trojans to a 22-3 record and a second straight Class 6A state championship this past season. Canady compiled a 13-1 record in the circle with a 0.84 earned run average, striking out 163 batters while allowing just 24 hits in 74.2 innings pitched. Ranked as the nation's No. 11 recruit in the Class of 2022 by Extra Inning Softball, Canady batted .530 with seven home runs, 37 runs scored and 42 RBI, posting a 1.091 slugging percentage.

A member of the Topeka High student council, Canady was also the Junior Class President. She has volunteered locally at homeless shelters and nursing homes, and she has donated her time as a youth basketball coach. "Nija is a very tough out and a player that you must handle very carefully at the plate," said Connie Miller, head coach of Manhattan High School. "She's a quality player."

Canady has maintained a weighted 4.49 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Stanford 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.

Two-time winner Canady joins recent Gatorade Kansas Softball Players of the Year Tatum Clopton (2019-20 & 2018-19, Lawrence Free State High School), and Lauren Mills (2017-18, Seaman 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, Canady 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. Canady 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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