

**EAST FORSYTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 **Kierston Deal** of **East Forsyth High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade North Carolina Softball Player of the Year**. Deal is the first Gatorade North Carolina Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from East Forsyth 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 Deal as North Carolina's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Deal 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-7 senior left-handed pitcher led the Eagles (27-3) to the Class 4A state final this past season. Deal posted a 23-3 record with a 0.79 ERA, striking out 305 batters in 150.1 innings pitched, while walking just 34. She also batted .533 with 5 home runs and 28 RBI. The Central Piedmont Conference Player of the Year and three-time Pitcher of the Year, Deal is also an Extra Inning Softball First Team All-American. She is ranked as the nation's No. 1 prospect in the Class of 2022 by Extra Inning Softball.

A devoted member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Deal has served as a peer tutor in her school system and has volunteered locally on behalf of the Salvation Army, a Vacation Bible School and youth sports programs. "Kierston Deal is the kind of top-notch athlete that doesn't come around often," said Natalie Layden, head coach at Ronald Reagan High School. "The statistics showing what she does on the mound and in the box speak for themselves, but she is a real competitor who understands what it takes to be successful."

Deal has maintained a weighted 4.38 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of Oklahoma 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.

Deal joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Softball Players of the Year Karlyn Pickens (2020-21, North Buncombe High School), Kenna Raye Dark (2019-20, Eastern Alamance High School), Jordan Hatch (2018-19, West Stanly High School), and Abby Settlemyre (2017-18, Fred T. Foard 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, Deal 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. Deal 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.