

**LINCOLN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 **Josie Bird** of **Lincoln County High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade West Virginia Softball Player of the Year**. Bird is the first Gatorade West Virginia Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Lincoln County 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 Bird as West Virginia'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, Bird 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-11 sophomore catcher led the Panthers to a 25-8 record and a berth in the winners' bracket final of the 3A state tournament this past season. She batted .488 with 10 home runs, 47 RBI and 25 runs scored, amassing an OPS of 1.557.

Bird has volunteered locally on behalf of a Christmas card service project in support of veterans in addition to donating her time at a local soup kitchen. She also has also given back to her community by organizing care packages for a women's shelter and by participating in school cleanup activities. "She killed the ball against us — didn't matter where we pitched her, she was able to hit any pitch," said Sherman High School head coach Terri Dawn Williams. "If the ball is around the plate, she will hit it."

Bird has maintained a 3.77 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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.

Bird joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Softball Players of the Year Tayven Stephenson (2020-21, St. Albans High School), Delani Buckner (2019-20 & 2017-18, Herbert Hoover High School), and Caiti Mathes (2018-19, Hurricane 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, Bird 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. Bird 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.