

**PADUA ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE DELAWARE GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 30, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Juliana Balon** of **Padua Academy** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Delaware Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Balon is the sixth Gatorade Delaware Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Padua Academy.

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 Balon as Delaware's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Balon joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2014-15 & 2013-14, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-7 sophomore won four individual events at the Division 1 state meet this past season, leading the Pandas to the state championship as a team. Balon broke the tape in the 100-meter dash in 12.12 seconds, while also capturing the 200 in 25.33 and the 400 in 57.84. To cap off a 40-point day, she leapt 18 feet, 2.5 inches to win the long jump. At the state Meet of Champions, she won the 100 and 200 and anchored Padua's victorious 4x400 relay quartet.

A student ambassador at her school, Balon has volunteered locally both Gold Star families and mentoring youth track athletes. "Juliana has been competing ever since she was a toddler," said Padua coach Marnie Giunta. "Her experience shows in her maturity, even as a sophomore, handling big meet competitions as well as her ability to manage multiple events."

Balon has maintained a 3.70 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.

Balon joins recent Gatorade Delaware Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Charlee Crawford (2020-21, St. Georges Technical High School), Erin Kelleher (2019-20, Padua Academy), Destiny Bailey-Perkins (2018-19, Caesar Rodney High School), and Lydia Olivere (2017-18, Padua Academy), 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, Balon 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. Balon 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.