

**RAYTOWN SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 **Zaya Akins** of **Raytown South High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Missouri Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Akins is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Raytown South 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 Akins as Missouri'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, Akins 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-8 junior won a national championship in the 400-meter dash this past season, breaking the tape in 52.88 seconds at the New Balance Nationals Outdoor, which ranked as the nation's No. 5 performance among prep competitors in 2022. Akins won the 400 at the Class 4 state meet in 53.41 and took the 100 in 11.32. She also swept all three sprints at the Great Southwest Classic.

Akins has served in her church's youth ministry and has volunteered locally on behalf of Ronald McDonald House Charities and the U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots program. "Zaya is a gifted athlete, but she doesn't lean solely on her talent," said Raytown South coach Thomas Stueve. "She works hard, is determined and wants to be the best version of herself."

Akins has maintained a 3.88 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.

Akins joins recent Gatorade Missouri Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Sydney Juszczuk (2020-21, Trinity Catholic High School), Courtney Williams (2019-20, Nerinx Hall), Tyra Wilson (2018-19, Rock Bridge High School), and Makayla Kelby (2017-18, Lee's Summit West 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, Akins 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. Akins 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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