

**HARDING UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 30, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Akala Garrett** of **Harding University High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Player of the Year**. Garrett is the second Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Harding University 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 Garrett as North Carolina'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, Garrett 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-6 junior won two national championships this past season, capturing both the 100-meter high hurdles and the 400-meter intermediate hurdles at the Nike Outdoor Nationals. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year in girls track and field, Garrett won the 400 hurdles in 57.46 seconds, which ranked as the nation's No. 1 performance among prep girls competitors in 2022, and she took the 100 high hurdles in 13.44. She also won both the 100 hurdles and the 300 hurdles at the Class 4A state meet. Her season-best clockings of 13.33 in the 100 hurdles and 40.62 in the 300 hurdles both ranked No. 1 nationally this season.

Garrett has volunteered locally on behalf of youth track programs. "Akala Garrett is fearless and a true joy to watch," said Brandon Webb, coach at Ardrey Kell High School. "I was fortunate to be out there for Nike Nationals and had the chance to watch her dominate some of the best athletes in the nation. She's a tremendous talent who embraces the challenge of competing in four events at every meet."

Garrett has maintained a 3.38 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.

Two-time winner Garrett joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Morgan Smalls (2019-20 & 2018-19, Panther Creek High School), and Veronica Fraley (2017-18, Wakefield 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, Garrett 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. Garrett 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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