

**DARIEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT VOLLEYBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 13, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Leilani Gillespie** of **Darien High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Connecticut Volleyball Player of the Year**. Gillespie is the sixth Gatorade Connecticut Volleyball Player of the Year to be chosen from Darien 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 court, distinguishes Gillespie as Connecticut's best high school volleyball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Volleyball Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Gillespie joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners, including Lexi Sun (2016-17, Santa Fe Christian School, Calif.), Jordan Larson (2004-05, Logan View High School, Neb.), Foluke Akinradewo (2004-05, St. Thomas High School, Fla.) and April Ross (1999-00, Newport Harbor High School, Calif.).

The 6-foot senior middle blocker and opposite hitter led the Blue Wave to a 25-0 record and the Class LL state championship this past season. Gillespie compiled 294 kills and 191 digs while posting a kill percentage of .522 and a hitting percentage of .387. She also recorded 50 service aces and 41 blocks. A First Team All-State selection, she was the GameTime Connecticut Player of the Year.

A member of the National Technical Honor Society, Gillespie has volunteered locally as part of multiple fundraising campaigns to benefit Alzheimer's research, and she has donated her time as the Darien High School boys volleyball team manager. "Leilani hits the ball with so much force and from any spot on the floor," said Steve Brienza, head coach of Wilton High School. "She reads well, she plays defense and she scores points. You can't stop her, you can only try to limit the damage."

Gillespie has maintained a 3.76 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play volleyball on scholarship at Northeastern University 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.

Gillespie joins recent Gatorade Connecticut Volleyball Players of the Year Liana Sarkissian (2021-22, Greenwich High School), Emma Appleman (2020-21, Guilford High School), Paula Hernandez (2019-20, Woodstock Academy), and Kiara Robichaud (2018-19, Joel Barlow High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Being a Gatorade Player of the Year means paying it forward for the next generation. Through Gatorade's Play it Forward initiative, every Player of the Year receives a grant to give to one of Gatorade's social impact partners, supporting Gatorade's ambition to fuel the future of sport. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 organizations.

For nearly 40 years, Gatorade has honored high school athletes at the top of their game as teammates, supporting their communities and achieving academic success. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes and community leaders, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport.

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.