

**GRACE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 8, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Sarah Strong** of **Grace Christian School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Strong is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Grace Christian 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 Strong as North Carolina's best high school girls basketball player. Strong joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Kiki Rice (2021-22, Sidwell Friends School, Washington, D.C.), Paige Bueckers (2019-20, Hopkins High School, Minn.), Nneka Ogumike (2007-08, CyFair High School, Texas), and Candace Parker (2003-04 & 2002-03, Naperville Central High School, Ill.).

The 6-foot-2 junior forward led the Crusaders to a 32-3 record and the North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association Class 2A state championship this past season. Strong averaged 22.6 points, 13.9 rebounds, 4.4 assists, 3.4 steals and 2.2 blocks per game, connecting on 58.0 percent of her field-goal attempts, including 40.9 percent from 3-point range. Ranked as the nation's No. 2 recruit in the Class of 2024 by Prospects Nation, Strong closed the season with back-to-back games of 20-plus points and 20-plus rebounds on the state semifinal and final stage.

Strong has volunteered locally as part of community beautification projects and as a youth basketball coach. She has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives on behalf of her church. "Sarah was the best all-around player I saw this season," said Jeff Little, head coach of Neuse Christian High School. "In addition to her scoring, she is an incredible passer and sees the floor like a coach."

Strong has maintained a 3.40 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.

Strong joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Basketball Players of the Year Indya Nivar (2021-22, Apex Friendship High School) and Saniya Rivers (2020-21 & 2019-20, Eugene Ashley High School and 2018-19, E.A. Laney 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.

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