

**ST. THOMAS AQUINAS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS SOCCER PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 23, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Sydney Watts** of **St. Thomas Aquinas High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Player of the Year**. Watts is the fifth Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Player of the Year to be chosen from St. Thomas Aquinas 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 Watts as Kansas' best high school girls soccer player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Soccer Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Watts joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Alyssa Thompson (2020-21, Harvard-Westlake School, Calif.), Mallory Swanson (2014-15, Mountain Vista High School, Colo.), Heather O'Reilly (2002-03 & 2001-02, East Brunswick High School, N.J.) and Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy School of Young Women, N.Y.).

The 5-foot-8 senior forward led the Saints (18-2-1) to a third straight 5A state championship this past season. The 5A Forward of the Year and the state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, Watts recorded 24 goals and 14 assists. Also the Eastern Kansas League Forward of the Year, she averaged 2.2 points per game.

Watts has volunteered locally at youth basketball and soccer camps and she's helped tutor a student with learning disabilities in English class. She also has donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church. "We played them twice this year and the first time she had two goals against us with three D-I defenders in front of her and a D1 keeper in the net—we could not stop her," said Michelle Pothoven, Blue Valley Northwest High School head coach. "No one else we've seen even comes close to her all-around talent."

Watts has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play soccer on scholarship at Vanderbilt 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.

Two-time winner Watts joins recent Gatorade Kansas Girls Soccer Players of the Year Grace O'Keefe (2020-21, St. Thomas Aquinas High School), Sophia Stram (2019-20, Bishop Miege High School), and Marissa Popoola (2018-19, Blue Valley West 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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