

**RAYTOWN SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSOURI GIRLS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 28, 2023) — In its 38<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Zaya Akins** of **Raytown South High School** is the **2022-23 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 Jasmine Moore (2018-19, Lake Ridge High School, Texas), Sydney McLaughlin (2016-17, 2015-16 & 2014-15, Union Catholic High School, N.J.), and Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa).

The state's returning Gatorade Girls Track & Field Player of the Year, the 5-foot-8 senior won Class 5 state titles in the 100-, 200- and 400-meter events this past season, concluding her prep career as the fastest competitor in Missouri history in each event, including a NWI mark of 11.36 in the 100 and a 52.83 effort in the 400 in 2023. Akins also ranked in the top 20 nationally in all three sprints among girls high school competitors, at the time of her selection. She captured a New Balance indoor national championship in the 400 and finished second in the outdoor 200 at the Great Southwest Classic.

Akins has volunteered locally with Ronald McDonald House Charities of Kansas City, Youth Ministries at Church, Toys for Tots, Student City Youth Group and Harvesters, in addition to creating and handing out care packages to deliver to those in need. "Zaya Akins added to her legacy as the most well-rounded sprinter in Missouri prep history, supporting her all-time marks in the 100 and 200 by lowering her own 400 standard with a second career sub-53 performance," said Erik Boal, editor at DyeStat.com. "Akins secured her third career national title in the 400 with a victory at the New Balance indoor final in Boston."

Akins has maintained a 3.88 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete on scholarship at the University of Kentucky 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 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), and Tyra Wilson (2018-19, Rock Bridge 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](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).