

**SACRED HEART ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KENTUCKY GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 14, 2024) — In its 39th year of honoring the nation’s most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **ZaKiyah Johnson** of **Sacred Heart Academy** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Kentucky Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Johnson is the second Gatorade Kentucky Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Sacred Heart Academy.

The award, which celebrates the nation’s top high school athletes for excellence on the court, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Johnson as Kentucky’s best high school girls basketball player. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport, touting an all-star group of alumni that includes Candace Parker (2003-04, 2002-03 & 2001-02, Naperville Central High School, Ill.), Paige Bueckers (2017-18, Hopkins High School, Minn.) and Juju Watkins (2022-23 & 2021-22, Sierra Canyon School, Calif.).

At the time of her selection, the 6-foot-1 junior guard and forward had led the Valkyries to a 26-7 record and a berth in the 7th Region Tournament championship game. Johnson averaged 18.9 points, 7.3 rebounds, 4.2 assists and 2.1 steals through 33 games. The state’s two-time returning Gatorade Player of the Year, Johnson was the MVP of the 2023 State Tournament. Ranked as the nation’s No. 3 recruit in the Class of 2025 by Prospects Nation, she entered the regional final with 2,969 points in her prep basketball career.

Johnson has volunteered locally with the Kiwanis Club and the Salvation Army. She has also donated her time as a youth basketball coach and referee. “Preparing for ZaKiyah is always a difficult task,” said Justin Holthaus, head coach of Randall K. Cooper High School. “Z’s athleticism, size and her understanding of the game is elite. She plays within her team’s system and oftentimes heavily involves her teammates. Z also has the ability to take over a game on any given night.”

Johnson has maintained a 3.34 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.

Three-time winner Johnson joins recent Gatorade Kentucky Girls Basketball Players of the Year Brooklynn Miles (2020-21, Franklin County High School) and Maddie Scherr (2019-20, Larry A. Ryle High School), among the state’s list of former award winners.

As part of Gatorade’s commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners’ grants have totaled more than \$4.9 million across more than 1,600 organizations.

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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