

RUTGERS PREPARATORY SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW JERSEY 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 Mikayla Blakes of Rutgers Preparatory School is the 2023-24 Gatorade New Jersey Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Blakes is the first Gatorade New Jersey Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Rutgers Preparatory School.

The award, which celebrates the nation's top high school athletes for excellence on the court, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Blakes as New Jersey'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.).

The 5-foot-8 senior guard averaged 21.3 points, 4.8 rebounds, 3.8 steals, 3.4 assists and 1.1 blocks per game this past season, leading the Argonauts (24-5) to the Non-Public B State Tournament championship game. Blakes is a McDonald's All-American Game selection and a member of the Nike Hoop Summit Team USA squad. Ranked as the nation's No. 10 recruit in the Class of 2023 by espnW, she is a three-time First Team All-State honoree.

Blakes has volunteered locally as a Key Club Ambassador at Rutgers Prep, serving as a host for prospective students. She has also donated her time at the Visions and Pathway Home for homeless youth and as a youth basketball coach. "Mikayla has grown tremendously over this year," said Mary Klinger, head coach of Rutgers Preparatory School. "I am constantly impressed by her exceptional skills and ability to perform on the biggest stages."

Blakes has maintained a weighted 4.25 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a national letter of intent to play basketball 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.

Blakes joins recent Gatorade New Jersey Girls Basketball Players of the Year Hannah Hidalgo (2022-23, Paul VI High School), Madison St. Rose (2021-22, St. John Vianney High School), Destiny Adams (2020-21, Manchester Township High School) and Kylee Watson (2019-20, Mainland Regional 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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