

SANDIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO 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 Sydney Benally of Sandia High School is the 2023-24 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Benally is the third Gatorade New Mexico Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Sandia High 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 Benally as New Mexico’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 5-foot-9 junior guard had led the Matadors (25-3) to the quarterfinals of the 5A state tournament, averaging 20.8 points, 6.4 rebounds, 4.2 assists and 3.4 steals per game through 28 games. The District 2 co-Player of the Year, Benally shot 54.2 percent from inside the arc, 42 percent from 3-point range and 72.9 percent from the free throw line entering the postseason round of eight.

Benally has volunteered locally with “Keeping Albuquerque Clean,” picking up trash along the side of the road. She has also donated her time with the Albuquerque Read-Aloud service, reading to area youth in addition to serving at the San Juan Veterinary Facility in Farmington, where she helps care for small animals. “She’s a tremendous athlete who can score at will and defend at the highest level,” said Lori Selby, head coach at Las Cruces High School. “What sets her apart from other players in the state is how unselfish she is and how she elevates the game of every player on her team. She’s a great passer and creates open looks for her teammates as well.”

Benally has maintained a 3.97 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.

Benally joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Girls Basketball Players of the Year Leilani Love (2022-23, Albuquerque High School), Juliana Aragon (2021-22, Bernalillo High School) and Viane Cumber (2020-21 & 2019-20, Sandia 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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