

**PONAGANSET HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE RHODE ISLAND 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 **Jaina Yekelchik** of **Ponaganset High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Basketball Player of the Year**. Yekelchik is the first Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Ponaganset 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 Yekelchik as Rhode Island’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-4 senior guard had led the Chieftains to a 17-7 record and the No. 4 seed in the state tournament this past season. Yekelchik averaged 16.1 points, 4.7 rebounds, 2.0 assists, 3.2 steals and 1.4 blocks through 24 games, earning First-Team All-State honors. During the regular season, she became the 10th player in program history to surpass 1,000 career points.

A member of the Rhode Island Department of Education Student Advisory Council, Yekelchik has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics in basketball and soccer. She has also donated her time to the National Education Association of Rhode Island’s Gingerbread Express, supporting families in need during the holiday season. “She has the ability to change the game by herself,” said Tammy Drape, St. Raphael Academy head coach. “With her steals turning into transition points and setting up teammates for scoring opportunities, she contributes in ways that don’t necessarily show up on the stat sheet. What has impressed me most about Jaina, is her ability to put the team’s success above individual glory.”

Yekelchik has maintained a 3.83 GPA in the classroom. She has committed to play basketball at nationally ranked Rhode Island College starting 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.

Yekelchik joins recent Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Basketball Players of the Year Genesis McNeill (2022-23, Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex), Jillian Rogers (2021-22, North Kingstown High School), Amaya Dowdy (2020-21, St. Raphael Academy), and Megan Bodziony (2019-20, St. Andrew’s 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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