

**LINCOLN-WAY CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 7, 2024) — In its 39th year of honoring the nation’s most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Bella Dimitrijevic** of **Lincoln-Way Central High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year**. Dimitrijevic is the first Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Lincoln-Way Central High School.

The award, which celebrates the nation’s top high school athletes for excellence on the field, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Dimitrijevic as Illinois’ best high school softball 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 Amanda Freed (1997-98, Pacifica High School, Calif.), Cat Osterman (2000-01, Cypress Springs High School, Texas), Rachel Garcia (2014-15 & 2012-13, Highland High School, Calif.) and Ava Brown (2022-23 & 2021-22, Lake Creek High School, Texas).

The 5-foot-10 junior right-handed pitcher posted a 26-3 record with a 0.54 earned run average this past season, leading the Knights (33-5) to the Super-Sectional round of the Class 4A state tournament. Dimitrijevic struck out 354 batters while allowing just 49 hits and 13 walks in 169.2 innings pitched. At the plate, she hit .405 with eight home runs and 42 runs batted in. A member of the Croatian National Team, she will participate in the Women’s Softball European Championships in the Netherlands this September.

Dimitrijevic has volunteered locally at the Bayer/Pulmonary Hypertension Association, assisting patients with limited mobility. She has also donated her time as a youth pitching instructor. “Bella could possibly be the most dominant pitcher that I have come across in 15-plus years of coaching high school softball,” said Heather Novak, head coach of Lincoln-Way West High School and also the 2000-01 Gatorade Illinois Softball Player of the Year. “She has a truly special ability on the mound to throw with great velocity and incredible movement.”

Dimitrijevic has maintained a weighted 4.36 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play softball on scholarship at Florida State University beginning in the fall of 2025.

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.

Dimitrijevic joins recent Gatorade Illinois Softball Players of the Year Sage Mardjetko (2022-23 & 2021-22, Lemont High School), Abby Dunning (2020-21, Marist High School) and Bailey Dowling (2019-20, St. Joseph-Ogden 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, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$4.9 million in grants to winners across more than 1,900 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 X(Twitter) at x.com/Gatorade.