

## **NORTHWEST RANKIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MISSISSIPPI SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 7, 2024) — In its 39<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Jolie Hays** of **Northwest Rankin High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year**. Hays is the second Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Northwest Rankin 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 Hays as Mississippi's 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-4 senior left-handed pitcher and outfielder led the Cougars to a 34-0 record and the Class 7A state championship this past season. Hays compiled a record of 20-0 with a 0.86 ERA and 189 strikeouts in 113.2 innings pitched. She also batted .524 with 29 RBI and was named Class 7A Miss Softball.

Hays has volunteered locally at a homeless shelter and on behalf of a Christmas outreach initiative for children in need. She has also served as a coach at Northwest Rankin's summer hitting and pitching camps. "She was a very important piece of their state championship," said Jimmy Parker, head coach at Harrison Central High School. "Her pitching was still very good, but her over .500 batting average was even more impactful. She had key hits all year long for them. She's also one of the smartest pitchers I have ever faced in setting up batters to fail."

Hays has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi 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.

Two-time winner Hays joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Softball Players of the Year Tenly Grisham (2021-22, Neshoba Central High School) and Paige Kilgore (2020-21 & 2019-20, Houston 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY), Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://x.com/Gatorade).