

## **LINCOLN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 **Josie Bird** of **Lincoln County High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade West Virginia Softball Player of the Year**. Bird is the first Gatorade West Virginia Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Lincoln County 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 Bird as West Virginia'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 2021-22 Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-11 senior catcher led the Panthers (23-6) to the AAA sectional finals this past season. Bird batted .563 with 38 RBI and 11 home runs while drawing 38 walks. She finished her career as Lincoln County's career leader in home runs (50), RBI (173), hits (160) and walks (104).

Bird has volunteered locally as a peer buddy for Special Olympics Spring Games and she's served as a mentor for younger athletes at Lincoln County High School through the softball team's Big Sis/Little Sis program. She has also donated her time by walking dogs at a local animal shelter and sending care packages to members of the military deployed overseas during the holidays. "Josie is a great player—at the plate, she brings a very powerful bat and she can hit for average or hit bombs," said Brad Huss, head coach for Team North Carolina Huss. "On defense, Josie works hard for her pitchers by framing the pitch locations and she has a cannon for an arm."

Bird has maintained a 4.04 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play softball on scholarship at Indiana 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.

Two-time winner Bird joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Softball Players of the Year Maci Boggess (2022-23, Winfield High School), Tayven Stephenson (2020-21, St. Albans High School) and Delani Buckner (2019-20, Herbert Hoover 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).