

Contact: John Manzo (312-729-3656)

**SOLON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE® OHIO GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (March 13, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Dee Bekelja of Solon High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Ohio Girls Basketball Player of the Year. Bekelja is the first Gatorade Ohio Girls Basketball Player of the Year to be chosen from Solon High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the court, distinguishes Bekelja as Ohio's best high school girls basketball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Basketball Player of the Year award announced in March, Bekelja joins an elite alumni association of past state girls basketball award-winners, including Maya Moore (2005-06, Collins Hill HS, Ga.), Rashanda McCants (2004-05, Asheville HS, N.C.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Diana Taurasi (1998-99 & 1999-00, Don Antonio Lugo HS, Calif.), Shyra Ely (1999-00, Ben Davis HS, Ind.) and Lisa Leslie (1988-89, Morningside HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-8 senior guard had led the Comets to a 23-2 record and a berth in the Division I state Round of 16 at the time of her selection. Bekelja averaged 19.8 points, 6.9 rebounds and 4.8 assists per game while shooting 58.3 percent from inside the arc through 25 games. A First Team All-State selection, she had scored more than 1,700 points in her prep career entering the postseason quarterfinals.

A member of the National Honor Society and Students Against Destructive Decisions, she has volunteered locally on behalf of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Laura's Home Women's Crisis Center and as a youth basketball coach. "I think when people watch Dee Bekelja they admire her will to win," said Solon High head coach Trish Kruse. "She will do whatever it takes to help her team be successful. Whether it's hitting a big shot or running into a wall to save a possession, if it helps the team, she will do it."

Bekelja has maintained a 3.56 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to play basketball on scholarship at DePaul 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 work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Bekelja joins recent Gatorade Ohio Girls Basketball Players of the Year Jensen Caretti (2015-16, River High School), Hallie Thome (2014-15, Chagrin Falls High School), Kelsey Mitchell (2013-14, Princeton High School), Bianca Quisenberry (2012-13, Tecumseh High School), Malina Howard (2011-12, Twinsburg High School), Ally Malott (2010-11, Madison High School), Amy Scullion (2009-10, Salem High School), Mikaela Ruef (2008-09, Beavercreek High School), Shay Selby (2007-08, Regina High School), and Jantel Lavender (2006-07, Cleveland Central Catholic High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Dee will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit www.gatorade.com/poy.

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