

East Alton-Wood River's Jayden Ulrich Is 2020-21 Gatorade Illinois Girls Track and Field Player of the Year

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Jayden Ulrich of East Alton-Wood River High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Illinois Girls Track and Field Player of the Year. Ulrich is the first Gatorade Illinois Girls Track and Field Player of the Year to be chosen from East Alton-Wood River 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 field, distinguishes Ulrich as Illinois' best high school girls track and field athlete.

Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track and Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Ulrich joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-9 senior won both the discus and the shot put at the Class 2A state meet this past season, launching the former a meet-record 160 feet, 6.75 inches, and hurling the latter 48-8.25. Ulrich set new state records with her season-best efforts in both events: 51-10.75 in the shot put and 168-1.75 in the discus. She also swept the two events at the National Throws Festival. Ulrich has volunteered locally on behalf of youth track programs.

“The COVID-19 Pandemic slowed her down and cost Jayden possible titles, but she continued to work, lifting and throwing very diligently,” said East Alton-Wood River coach Russ Colona. “She set goals and then surpassed every one of them.”

Ulrich has maintained a 3.64 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on scholarship at Indiana University Bloomington 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 works with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport. Ulrich joins recent Gatorade Illinois Girls Track & Field Players of the Year Katelynne Hart (2019-20, 2018-19, & 2017-18, Glenbard West High School), and

Kathleen Young (2016-17, Warrensburg-Latham High School), among the state's list of former award winners. Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Ulrich has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing.

Ulrich is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization they chose is deserving of one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants, which will be announced throughout the year. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants has totaled more than \$2.7 million across 1,117 organizations. Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners, and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

