

sports girls

Meet Gatorade's 2005-2006 National Players of the Year.

These ladies are taking the athletic world by storm!

track & field

bianca knight, 18



You could say Bianca's track-and-field career got off to a running start—she competed for the U.S. Junior Olympic team the summer before eighth grade and earned three bronze medals. Then, at the end of her freshman year, Bianca made the world team, competing in Africa. Still not impressed? As a junior, she ran the fastest time by a thousandth of a second in the last track meet of the year. "So for a whole year, I got to be the No. 1 high schooler in the nation!" she remembers.

Bianca also understands that with success comes a lot of pressure. "You'd think kids my age wouldn't [use things like performance enhancers], but it's happening more now and I have to compete against that."

Bianca looks to Marion Jones, one of her favorite athletes, for inspiration. She admires the path Marion's taken along the way: college, followed by a successful career and a family.



soccer

lauren cheney, 19



There isn't much that can stop Lauren, including open-heart surgery at age three, which she declares, "never really phased [me] much." This gutsy girl first got into soccer after watching her older brother kick the ball around. Now she's one of the nation's best players. She's even trained and played with the full U.S. Women's Under-21 National Team. "I was hanging out with Olympic gold medalists. I met Mia Hamm and hung out with Abby Wambach. That was probably the best moment," Lauren says.

Her most exciting goal so far happened during the World Cup Qualifiers for the Youth Under-20 National Team. Lauren's team was down both a player and a point until she scored the assist to tie the game and the winning goal.

Outside of soccer skills, Lauren loves to relax, dress up and shop. In fact, she's got a major addiction to heels. "I'm obsessed," she admits. "I'd wear heels every day if I could!" Whether it's in muddy cleats or pointy pumps, one thing's for sure, this girl likes to step out in style.





kirsten shortridge, 19

softball

Kirsten may have signed up for fast-pitch softball on a whim, but after years of hard work and intense practice, she's become accustomed to dominating the field. As a junior in high school, her team won Nationals (meaning it was ranked No. 1 by USA Today/NFCA). She credits her success to her fierce competitive spirit. "I don't care if it's just a card game, I'm not going to lose!"

Even with all her accomplishments, Kirsten has one big wish: that her mom had been there to see the victories. The same year she won Nationals, Kirsten's mother passed away from heart failure. To get through it, Kirsten focused on setting an example for the rest of her family.

Off the field, Kirsten is inspired by her disabled younger brother and has chosen to work with disabled children. "I pretty much live in the classroom," she explains. "When I walk into the classroom the kids are like, 'Kirsten! Kirsten!' and it's just amazing to hear them react like that."

"It's probably the most difficult thing I've faced, but it's kept me motivated. I just want to make her proud."



tina charles, 18

basketball

Tina has always loved basketball. "I even had a Fisher-Price basketball hoop!" she exclaims. But in the sixth grade, she started getting serious about the sport. These days, Tina loves taking a leadership role and being the one to hype everyone up. "I try to have fun any time I can and do things like cracking jokes."

Still, this hoopster knows that being the best takes determination and a strong work ethic. "I think a lot of people my age forget that basketball is about

patience and perseverance and that everything happens in time. It's sometimes hard to remember to take that time," she says.

Tina's most exciting sports moment is hitting the winning buzzer shot in a game at Madison Square Garden in New York City! But it's not that kind of personal victory the teen superstar considers her greatest athletic achievement. Instead, Tina's most proud of creating a strong sense of team spirit.

