

Jones Named N.C. Gatorade Player Of Year

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In its 28th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, has announced Ryder Jones of Watauga High School in Boone, N.C., as its 2012-13 Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year. Jones, who signed his National Letter of Intent with Stanford University in the Pacific 12 Conference, is the first Gatorade North Carolina Baseball Player of the Year to be chosen from Watauga High School. The 6-foot-4, 195-pound senior shortstop batted .461 with 11 home runs and 43 RBI this past season, leading the Pioneers to a 15-11 record.

A Rawlings Preseason First Team All-American as named by Perfect Game USA, Jones recorded 31 runs, 21 walks and 11 doubles. He compiled a .652 on-base percentage and a .987 slugging percentage. Also a right-handed pitcher, Jones owned a 4-3 record with one save, a 1.23 ERA and 63 strikeouts in 40.1 innings-pitched. As a junior at Stillwater (Okla.) High last season, he captured 2012 Honorable Mention All-State honors from The Oklahoman.

Jones has maintained a 4.00 weighted GPA in the classroom, and he is a member of the National Honor Society. He has donated his time as a peer tutor and youth baseball instructor in addition to volunteering locally as a blood donor, at a Humane Society shelter, as part of a youth literacy-outreach initiative and on behalf Oklahoma's Children's Hospital at Saint Francis. "His playing ability speaks for its self," said Chip Watts, head coach of rival St. Stephens High. "This kid has one of the most pure swings. He was a man among boys and dominated the high school level. He is an excellent young man and plays the game the right way. Watauga head coach Pete Hardee does a great job with his baseball program, and he's been coached and molded under one of the best coaches around."

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 high school sports leadership team in partnership with USA TODAY High School Sports, 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.

Jones is listed as the No. 54 prospect by PerfectGame.org in the class of 2013 rankings. He is projected to go as high as the second round of the Major League Amateur Draft on June 6. Jones is the son of first-year Appalachian State head coach Billy Jones, who was an assistant coach at Oklahoma State in 2012.

Photo Courtesy: Ryder Jones, PHOTO SUBMITTED