

JuJu Watkins and Paige Bueckers Help Gatorade Get to Bottom of 'It'

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If Gatorade is going to let its “Is It In You?” slogan hang around for the better part of three decades, it occasionally needs to allow a new generation to determine what “it” is.

For its latest March Madness campaign, Gatorade recruited USC sophomore guard and Big 10 player of the year JuJu Watkins, highly decorated University of Connecticut senior Paige Bueckers, and Duke University freshman phenom Cooper Flagg to provide their perspective on “it.” In a spot titled “The Take,” the athletes discuss how “it” isn’t just the effort they have to give but the criticism and obsessive adulation they have to take.

Having jumped on with Gatorade during the infancy of name, image, and likeness rights deals in 2021, Bueckers views the campaign somewhat wistfully as she heads into her last NCAA tournament with UConn and a future that already involves an equity stake in the Unrivaled 3-on-3 league.

“Having been the first NIL athlete on the Gatorade roster, it’s extremely rewarding to look back at all we’ve accomplished together over the last few years,” Bueckers said. “Gatorade has fueled me throughout the highs and lows of my

college career, and I'm excited to see what lies ahead for us in the future."

Watkins, who signed her NIL deal with Gatorade in October, plays a somewhat larger role—collaborating with the brand on a limited-edition Gatorade Squeeze Bottle containing both her signature and her mantra, "Without struggle, there is no progress." Flagg also joined Gatorade in October and knows a little something about struggle after following an explosive season with the Blue Devils with an injury during the ACC men's tournament.

No, "it" isn't JuJu Watkins' Gatorade bottle.

"This is my first Gatorade campaign since becoming a Gatorade athlete," Flagg said. "I grew up watching the greats in iconic Gatorade commercials, and to now be in one myself alongside

such talented athletes is surreal.”

As a Gatorade marketing query, “Is It In You?” predates Flagg by almost 20 years.

First unveiled by Foote, Cone, and Belding Chicago in the late 1990s, the campaign was a sports marketing classic that featured black-and-white images of athletes dripping with Gatorade-colored sweat that made consuming the sports drink the difference between success and failure—even for accomplished pitcher Michael Jordan.

Last year, during the NBA playoffs, PepsiCo’s Gatorade and creative partners TBWA\Chiat\Day reconsidered the campaign for the modern era, bringing back Jordan to narrate the new 60-second lead spot—“It Hasn’t Changed”—and adding Caitlin Clark, A’ja Wilson, Jayson Tatum, Josh Allen, and Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone to address a different “it.”

“There is a significant rise in youth participation declines,” said Anuj Bhasin, Gatorade’s chief brand officer. “Sports isn’t the way that it was before for them.”

Bhasin cited Gatorade’s research that found that 53% of young athletes stop playing because of external pressures, including mental health, criticism, doubt, and hype culture. However, clinical data suggests that may be an underestimate. The American Academy of Pediatrics found that 70% of athletes under the age of 13 drop out of youth sports after a combination of overtraining, overuse injuries, and burnout.

Much as the “Is It In You” campaign’s revival was meant to reverse youth athlete burnout, this next step is meant to show all aspects of the journey for stars who make it through.

“Our brand has a storied history of partnering with generational young talent and fueling them on their way to being some of the greatest athletes in the world,” said Jeff Kearney, Gatorade’s global head of sports marketing. “Our college basketball campaign is all about elevating the voices of those athletes and spotlighting all that they put in to win.”

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