

EAST COWETA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE GEORGIA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (February 11, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation’s best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Kyle Harkabus of East Coweta High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Harkabus is the first Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from East Coweta 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 Harkabus as Georgia’s best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in February, Harkabus joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg, Orland Park High School, Ill.), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-9, 145-pound junior won the GHSA 7A individual state championship this past season, breaking the tape with a time of 16:08.55. Harkabus crossed the line 12th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 15:26.60 and missed qualifying for nationals by only 11.84 seconds. He won seven of the nine races he entered last fall, including the Championship Division run at the Wingfoot XC Classic, where he broke the tape in 15:46.40.

Harkabus has maintained a 94.5 average in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school this fall.

Harkabus has served as a recreation assistant at SonRise Baptist Church Vacation Bible School, mentoring youth in various activities and sports. He has also donated his time to coaching middle school students training as runners in addition to volunteering locally for the Abby’s Angels Charity Run. “Every success Kyle has had in three short years is attributable to his self-discipline, motivation and humility,” said East Coweta head coach Valerie Rodriguez. “Being his coach is a dream, not just because he is so talented, but because of how he trains and accepts his role as a rising star athlete in the community. Kyle leads by example, inspires his teammates to be their best and understands that his successes are due to his hard work as well as the people who support him.”

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. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Harkabus joins Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Sam Bowers (2017-18, Milton High School), Jacob McLeod (2016-17, Trinity Christian School), Frank Pittman (2015-16, Marist School), Reilly Friedman (2014-15, The Galloway School), and Austin Sprague (2013-14, St. Pius X Catholic High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a part of Gatorade’s cause marketing platform “Play it Forward,” Harkabus has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of his choosing. He is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

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 www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.