

AINSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEBRASKA 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 **Ben Arens of Ainsworth High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Arens is the first Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Ainsworth 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 Arens as Nebraska'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, Arens 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-11, 135-pound senior won the Class D state meet this past season with a course-record time of 16:02.4, breaking the tape over a minute ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Bulldogs to a fifth-place finish as a team. Arens was the first Class D runner to win the all-class gold medal with the fastest overall time at the state meet. He was undefeated and set five course records this fall.

The president of both the Ainsworth High student council and senior class, Arens has volunteered locally with the Brown County Youth Grant Committee, which allocates grant funds to community organizations. He has also donated his time with a local fun run and as a youth soccer coach. "Ben Arens is a great runner and an outstanding young man," said Doug Zoucha, head coach of Norfolk Catholic High. "His record speaks for itself. Ben does everything expected of him and more."

Arens has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom and ranks No. 1 in his class. He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Arens joins Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Jake Ralston (2017-18, Papillion-La Vista South High School), Seth Hirsch (2016-17 & 2015-16, Millard West High School), John Nownes (2014-15, Creighton Preparatory School), and Wyatt McGuire (2013-14, North Platte 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," Arens 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.