

## VIRGINIA EPISCOPAL SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE VIRGINIA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

**CHICAGO** (February 11, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Daniel O'Brien of Virginia Episcopal School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year**. O'Brien is the first Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Virginia Episcopal 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 O'Brien as Virginia'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, O'Brien joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg High School, 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-10, 135-pound junior won the Virginia Independent School Division 2 state meet this past season with a time of 15:55.5, breaking the tape 1:28.9 ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Bishops to the state team title. O'Brien finished third at the Foot Locker South Regional championships and he took 12th at Foot Locker nationals to earn All-American status. He did not lose to an in-state runner all season.

The head of the Virginia Episcopal Debate Club, O'Brien has volunteered as his dorm's residential assistant, and he has donated his time helping build a cross country course on the Virginia Episcopal campus. "I saw Daniel run in three meets this year and he seems to get stronger as he goes," said Rich Higgins, head coach of Walsingham Academy. "I tried to find a strategy for our top runner, and the best I could do was: Daniel seemed a little less dominant on hills. When he went by the 1-mile at 4:45 on a muddy, hilly course, it was apparent that he was by far the best I'd seen in years."

O'Brien has maintained an A average in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school this fall.

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.

O'Brien joins Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Sam Affolder (2017-18, Loudoun Valley High School), Waleed Suliman (2016-17, Douglas Freeman High School), Drew Hunter (2015-16, Loudoun Valley High School), Andrew Hunter (2014-15, Loudoun Valley High School), and Louis Colson (2013-14, Thomas Edison 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," O'Brien 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](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).