

## **LOYOLA COLLEGE PREP STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE LOUISIANA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 10, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Will Dart of Loyola College Prep as its 2019-20 Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Dart is the first Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Loyola College Prep.

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 Dart as Louisiana'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, Dart 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, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester High School, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-11, 135-pound senior distance talent won the LHSAA Class 3A state title this past season, breaking the tape in 15:45.80—36.4 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor—to clock the fastest all-class time at the state championships, set a new class record and lead the Flyers to a seventh-place finish as a team. Dart also broke three course records in 2019, including his personal-best 3-mile time of 14:57.94 to win the Ruston Invitational. He also crossed the line 67th at the NXN South Regional championships with a time of 16:32.00 in the 5K race, and he set his 5K PR in finishing eighth in 15:31.21 as the top Louisiana runner at the Marcus Invitational.

A member of his school's Fellowship of Christian athletes chapter as well as the Spanish and 1st Priority clubs, Dart has donated his time on behalf of the Asbury United Methodist Church Youth Group and as a tutor for students at St. John's Elementary School. He has also volunteered locally as part of community service initiatives to benefit the City of Shreveport Swim Team and Sportspectrum Race Management. "Will Dart is a man of character, conscience and compassion," said Marcos Villalba, head coach at Loyola College Prep. "He's a natural leader for the other athletes on the team, plus he has a great work ethic, personality and determination. Will is self-motivated and is always willing to help out when needed. He's always thinking of his teammates and he's steadfastly faithful and humble."

Dart has maintained a 4.34 weighted GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Louisiana State University 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 and 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.

Dart joins recent Gatorade Louisiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year Hunter Appleton (2018-19, Brother Martin High School), Adam Wise (2017-18, Fontainebleau High School), Eric Coston (2016-17, St. Paul's School), Devyn Keith (2015-16, John Curtis Christian School) and Devyn Keith (2014-15, John Curtis Christian School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Dart 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).