

AUBURN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ALABAMA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 21, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Sarah Tole of Auburn High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Alabama Girls Cross Country Player of the Year.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation's best high school athletes for their excellence in sport, academics and community. The award recognizes Tole as Alabama's best high school girls cross country athlete, and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, CA), Katelyn Tuohy (2017-18, 2018-19 & 2019-20, North Rockland High School, NY) and Jane Hedengren (2024-25, Timpview High School, UT).

The 5-foot-4 junior was the top high school finisher at the AHSAA Class 7A state meet this past season with a time of 18:12.3, crossing the line 3.1 seconds ahead of her next-closest prep competitor and leading the Tigers to the team title. A three-time Class 7A individual state champion, Tole finished the season unbeaten against. She also took ninth in the Alexander/Asics Invitational, an interstate challenge showcasing many of the South's top talents.

Tole has volunteered locally as a member of Auburn Community Church's student group, babysitting for parish families and serving as a positive role model for younger girls in the ministry. She has also donated her time at the CARE Humane Society, helping to care for animals and lending support at pet adoption events. "Already a three-time state individual champion entering the season, Sarah Tole ran the table against in-state challengers throughout the season," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Her pace-setting also towed Auburn High School atop the podium for a third consecutive team title."

Tole has maintained a weighted 4.24 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her senior year of high school this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one state winner from each of the 50 states and Washington D.C., in 12 different sports: football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, baseball, softball, boys and girls soccer, and boys and girls track & field. In total, 610 high school athletes are honored each year. From the pool of state winners, one national winner is selected in each of the 12 sports. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the winners in each sport.

As part of Gatorade's commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$6.4 million in grants to winners across more than 2,200 organizations.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://www.x.com/Gatorade).

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