

NIWOT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE COLORADO 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 Addison Ritzenhein of Niwot High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Colorado 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 Ritzenhein as Colorado'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-3 senior won the CHSAA Class 5A state meet this past season, breaking the tape in a time of 17:08.5 to record the fastest all-class clocking of the day by 29 seconds in leading the Cougars to the team title. A three-time state champion, Ritzenhein broke the tape at the Desert Twilight, one of the premier in-season invitationals in the country, and she's paced her team to three consecutive runner-up team finishes at Nike Cross Nationals. She is now a three-time Gatorade Player of the Year in cross country.

Ritzenhein serves as part of the Niwot High School Leadership Academy and as a student aide at her school. She's also a member of her school's choir. She has volunteered locally on behalf of the REAL Training youth running club and in the concession booth for Niwot High School boosters. "After setting the state meet course record last year, Addison Ritzenhein again dominated this year's race to join an elite class of three-time individual state champions," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "She should be especially proud of how her season ended—despite battling a 101-degree fever at Nationals, this consummate, team-first athlete rose to the occasion and led Niwot High School to a runner-up team finish at nationals, one of the top showings ever by a Colorado squad."

Ritzenhein has maintained a weighted 4.35 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at Northern Arizona University 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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