

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE KANSAS 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 Kaylie Shultz of Central High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Kansas 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 Shultz as Kansas' 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-6 junior won the KSHSAA Class 5A state meet this past season with a time of 17:26.3, crossing the line 10.5 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Mustangs to an eighth-place team finish. Shultz also won the AVCTL Division 1/2 League Championships in 16:45.3, the second-fastest 5K clocking in state history. She broke the tape at both the Rim Rock Farm Classic and the Salina Invitational as well.

The school's Junior Class Vice-President, Shultz has volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics. She also has donated her time to the Relay for Life Salina Youth, Salina Central Trunk-or-Treat and the Salina Kansas Toy-A-Thon "Winning every race she entered inside Kansas, Kaylie Shultz cemented state's all-time greats with still a year to go in her prep career," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack.

Shultz has maintained a 4.00 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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