

## PIONEER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MICHIGAN GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 21, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Natasza Dudek of Pioneer High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Michigan 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 Dudek as Michigan'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-2 sophomore became the first high school girl to win both premier national championship races in the same cross country campaign this past fall, breaking the tape at both the Nike Cross Nationals and the Brooks XC Championships. Dudek won both races by a 1.6-second margin to become just the third sophomore girl to win either national title. She won the MHSAA LP Division 1 state meet with a personal-best time of 16:09.50, which also broke the course record by 23.6 seconds. Dudek followed that up by breaking the course record at the NXN Midwest Regional Championships in Indiana. She went 13-0 last fall.

A member of her school's Science Olympiad team, Dudek has volunteered locally by removing the seat cushions at the University of Michigan stadium upon the football season's conclusion. She has also donated her time locally with the Women in Sports Club, on behalf of which she has coached youth athletes and organized a sports-equipment drive for underserved communities. "In my view, Natasza Dudek was the best girls cross country performer in the country last fall," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Her resume speaks for itself, and she's only a sophomore."

Dudek has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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](http://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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