

## **BILLINGS CENTRAL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MONTANA 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 Addison Kegel of Billings Central Catholic High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Montana 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 Kegel as Montana'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-5 freshman won the Nike Cross Northwest Regional Championships with a time of 16:51.7 this past season. Kegel followed that by taking 11th at Nike Cross Nationals in 17:31.4 to earn Second Team All-American honors. Her 17:48.8 clocking to win the Class A state title was a meet record and led the Rams to a fifth-place finish as a team. She was undefeated against in-state competition last fall.

A member of her school's American Sign Language Club and a clarinetist in the Pep Band, Kegel has volunteered locally with Refresh the Rims, which cleans up public walking paths. She has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church. "Addison is amazing; she is head-and-shoulders above everyone else," said Lauren Zent, head coach of Billings West High School. "She doesn't even know how talented she is, I don't think. She's truly special and I know even bigger things are headed her way."

Kegel has maintained an A average in the classroom. She will begin her sophomore 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](https://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://x.com/Gatorade).

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