

## CROFTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEBRASKA 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 Avery Arens of Crofton High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Nebraska 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 Arens as Nebraska'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 freshman won the NSAA Class D state meet this past season with a state record time of 17:29.0, eclipsing the previous mark set by state four-time Gatorade Player of the Year Jeralyn Poe of Lincoln North Star High School (2011-15). Arens broke the tape a staggering one minute and 58.9 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor, leading the Warriors to a second-place team finish. She also took 10th at the NXN Heartland Regional Championship, to earn Second Team All-Region honors and complete an unbeaten campaign against Nebraska runners.

Also a basketball talent, Arens has volunteered locally at Crofton's Santa Day, organizing children's games for the event, and as part of litter pickup days following severe weather episodes. A participant in NSAA public speaking and one-act play production competitions, also has donated her time on behalf of the St. Rose of Lima Parish. "There's nothing more precocious than clocking the 5K state record when you're only a freshman," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Avery Arens' debut season was littered with blowout victories against in-state rivals, creating intrigue for what her future holds on the national level."

Arens has maintained a 4.00 GPA 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](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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