

BISMARCK CENTURY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NORTH DAKOTA 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 Ruby Ihmels of Bismarck Century High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade North Dakota 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 Ihmels as North Dakota'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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-4 junior won the Class A state meet for a second straight year, clocking a time of 17:06.9 to cross the line 1:04.8 ahead of her next-closest competitor. Ihmels' victory led the Patriots to a second-place finish as a team. Also the 2024-25 Gatorade North Dakota Girls Track & Field Player of the Year, she finished eighth at the Nike Cross Heartland Regional Championships to earn Second Team All-Region honors.

A writer for the Literature Magazine at Century High School, Ihmels has volunteered locally as a marshal at middle school and youth cross country and track meets. "Ruby had a great year and was dominant this season in North Dakota," said Chase Gregory, head coach of Williston High School. "What makes her special is she's not afraid to get out and push the pace."

Ihmels has maintained a weighted 4.13 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.

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