

## CLOVER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA 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 Ella Nighbor of Clover High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade South Carolina 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 Nighbor as South Carolina'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-6 senior broke the tape at the Class 5A state meet with a time of 17:37.78, leading the Blue Eagles to the team title. Nighbor was the state's top finisher at the Hare & Hounds Invitational (9th), the Brooks XC South Regional Championships (17th) and the Great American XC Festival (20th). Her winning time at the Bob Jenkins York County Championships came in a personal-best 17:26.2.

A Student Ambassador and a peer tutor at her school, Nighbor has volunteered locally on behalf of the Imagine Church Youth Group, Operation Christmas Child and the Salvation Army. In addition, she's participated in the AMC Math Competition and qualified for the National Association of Teachers Regional as a singer. Nighbor has also donated her time to the Lake Wylie Athletic Association. "Ella Nighbor ran a good slate of competitive races on courses with a challenging degree of difficulty," said John Olson of MileSplit SC. "She led her team to the state title and was the state's fastest finisher at Brooks South. My vote for Gatorade Player of the Year would be for her."

Nighbor has maintained a weighted 5.52 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at the University of South Carolina 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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