

## **SPEARFISH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE SOUTH DAKOTA 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 Peyton VanDeest of Spearfish High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade South 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 VanDeest as South 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 5-foot-11 junior earned First Team All-Region honors this past season by taking second at the Nike Cross Heartland Regional Championships with a time of 17:04.3. VanDeest followed that effort by finishing 37th at Nike Cross Nationals. She also finished second at the Class AA state meet, leading the Spartans to a sixth-place finish as a team and she concluded the season ranked No. 19 in the national MileSplit50.

A member of her local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, VanDeest has donated her time to the Court Appointed Special Advocates program, a collection of volunteers appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of children and youth who have experienced abuse or neglect. She has also served on behalf of the Special Olympics. "Peyton is an outstanding example of an athlete who had success as a middle schooler, but continued to progress and excel (as an athlete) in high school," said Jesse Coy, head coach of Rapid City Stevens High School. "What stands out with Peyton is her confidence to stick her nose in races and run with the best. That toughness had propelled her to some of the top performances in South Dakota history."

VanDeest has maintained a 3.92 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](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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