

## **HUNTSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 13, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Charles Pearson of Huntsville High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Alabama Boys 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 Pearson as Alabama's best high school boys cross country athlete, and he joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Lukas Verzbicas (2009-10 & 2010-11, Carl Sandburg High School, IL) Edward Cheserek (2012-13, Saint Benedict's Preparatory School, NJ) and Charlie Vause (2024-25, Rio Rancho High School, NM).

The 5-foot-8, 135-pound senior won the AHSAA Class 7A state meet this past season with a time of 15:25.9, breaking the tape 2.1 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Panthers to a third-place finish as a team. A four-time All-State honoree, Pearson posted the season's fastest time among Alabama preps to win the Dew It on the Trails Invitational in 15:17.2. He also was the state's top finisher at the Alexander/Asics Invitational in Georgia.

A member of both the National Junior Honor Society and the faith-based Young Life ministry, Pearson has volunteered locally with A New Leash On Life, which supports animal adoption. He has also donated his time mentoring young swimmers at the Valley Hill Summer Swim Camp. "After investing in a competitive regular-season schedule, Charles Pearson reaped the dividends when it mattered most," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Sitting outside the Top 10 and 40 meters behind the leaders at the mile mark of his state meet, the poised senior passed 13 rivals and endured a thrilling stretch run to triumph in his most significant challenge of the year."

Pearson has maintained a weighted 4.20 GPA in the classroom. He remains undecided upon a college destination.

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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