

EAST ANCHORAGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ALASKA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (February 13, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Katahdin Staples of East Anchorage High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Alaska 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 Staples as Alaska'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 6-foot, 155-pound junior won his second straight Division 1 state meet this past season with a time of 16:33.2, breaking the tape 3.2 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor. Staples won 10 of the 11 races he entered and was undefeated last fall against in-state competition. He clocked a personal-best 15:36.2 at the Nike Hole In The Wall XC Invitational last October.

Staples has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through his East Anchorage High School's Partners Club, Key Club and Student Advisory Board. He has also donated his time with the Special Olympics and as a peer math tutor. "Not only was Katahdin the fastest cross country runner in the state and a two-time state champion, he was also undefeated against Alaska competition," said Christina Shurtleff, head coach of East Anchorage High School. "Katahdin's support for his teammates and his ability to lead by example are unparalleled among the athletes I have coached."

Staples has maintained a weighted 4.14 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his 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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