

**FLAGSTAFF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE
ARIZONA 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 Yohanes van Meerten of Flagstaff High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Arizona 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 van Meerten as Arizona'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, 125-pound junior took second at Nike Cross Nationals this past season, the highest finish in meet history by an Arizona prep. Van Meerten crossed the line just 2.2 seconds off the title pace. He earned dual All-American honors after finishing fourth at the Brooks Cross Country Championships and also won the AIA Division II state meet in a course record time of 14:56.2, leading the Eagles to the team title. He smashed Mt. SAC Invitational course record in mid-October and the following month broke by 7.1 seconds the previous state meet course standard held by Tuba City High School's Billy Orman, the 2010-11 Gatorade State Player of the Year.

A member of Flagstaff High School's chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Van Meerten has volunteered locally coaching in a youth basketball league at the Boys and Girls Club. "A furious closing stretch rallied Yohanes Van Meerten to the silver medal in his toughest race of the year at Nike Cross Nationals, but his mid-season showing at the Mt. SAC Invitational was equally impressive," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Destroying the course record while seemingly relaxed and in a controlled fashion, he handed high-quality rivals with their most humbling margins of defeat. This kid harbors an incredibly scary upside for his senior year."

Van Meerten has maintained a 3.30 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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