

## **BENTONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ARKANSAS 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 Brian Burns of Bentonville High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Arkansas 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 Burns as Arkansas' 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-2, 135-pound senior won the Class 6A state meet this past season, sparking the Tigers to the team title. Burns was also Arkansas' fastest competitor at the national Brooks XC Championships, where he took 13th, Nike Cross Nationals (16th), the Southlake Carroll Invitational (3rd), the Chile Pepper XC Festival (3rd) and the NXN South Regional, where he crossed the line in a personal-best 14:45.6 to finish fourth. A Second Team All-American at NXN and Third Team All-American at Brooks, he concluded the year ranked No. 19 in the national MileSplit50.

Burns has been a member of Bentonville High School's Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Future Farmers of American chapters and has participated in an IT consulting internship with AIM Consulting in Rogers. He has also volunteered locally in association with a Brooks partnership, serving as a mentor to youth distance-running athletes. "November and December are the championship months of high school cross country and Brian Burns was clearly the class of Arkansas on last fall's biggest stages," said Rich Gonzalez, editor of PrepCalTrack. "He PR'd at NXN South regionals three days before Thanksgiving, then earned All-American honors at the sport's two premier national championship races in consecutive weeks in December."

Burns has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at the University of North 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://x.com/Gatorade).

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