

BELEN JESUIT PREPARATORY SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE FLORIDA 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 Marcelo Mantecon of Belen Jesuit Preparatory School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Florida 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 Mantecon as Florida'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 returning Gatorade State Player of the Year, 5-foot-8, 130-pound junior took second at the Brooks Cross Country Championships this past season, missing out on a national title by a lean. A dual First Team All-American thanks to his fourth-place finish at Nike Cross Nationals, Mantecon won his second straight FHSAA Class 3A state meet, breaking the tape 9.4 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor to lead the Wolverines to the team title. A winner in 8 of his 11 races, he broke the state 5K record with a time of 14:33 at the New World Spectacular.

Mantecon has volunteered locally by supporting the underserved on behalf of the LaSalle Educational Center, the Big Brother, Big Sister Foundation, Reyes Magis, the Abuelos Foundation and Hermanos de la Calle. He has also donated his time to Kick it for Wow, assisting people with Down syndrome and mental illness. "An age-group sensation in middle school, Marcelo Mantecon has continued to excel in prep ranks," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "He navigated a full schedule of high-end meet opportunities to clock the fastest prep 5K time in state history. Next year, he'll aim to become Florida's first national champion at either of the premier season-ending meets."

Mantecon has maintained a weighted 3.96 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](https://www.x.com/Gatorade).

###