

DOWNERS GROVE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ILLINOIS 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 Philip Cupial of Downers Grove North High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Illinois 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 Cupial as Illinois' 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-10, 165-pound senior won the IHSA Class 3A state meet this past season with a time of 14:03.1, breaking the tape 4.3 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Trojans to second place as a team. Cupial followed up by clocking the best time in history by an Illinois runner on Indiana's nationally renowned LaVern Gibson Championship Course to win the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional Championship. He also posted wins at both the Naperville Twilight and First to the Finish invitationals.

Cupial has volunteered locally with StriveX, a business platform that connects strategic investors with innovative startups. He has also donated his time by mentoring other athletes in the college recruiting process and providing support at community running events like the Naperville Women's Half-Marathon and 5K. "In a senior campaign loaded with personal highlights – including being part of back-to-back team titles at the state and regional championship levels – Philip Cupial is deservedly crowned as the state's best this year," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "He also established a legacy, becoming Illinois' new record-holder on Indiana's famed LaVern Gibson Championship Course that has been a premier venue nationally for decades."

Cupial has maintained a weighted 3.85 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at the University of Virginia 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).

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