

## **ALBUQUERQUE ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW MEXICO 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 Nicholas Ponte of Albuquerque Academy is the 2025-26 Gatorade New Mexico 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 Ponte as New Mexico'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-11, 142-pound senior won the NMAA Class 4A state meet this past season with a time of 15:18.8, breaking the tape 27.5 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Chargers to the team championship. Ponte won six of seven races during the season, including triumphs at the New Mexico Lobo Invitational and the Academy Extravaganza. He finished the season unbeaten against New Mexico challengers.

A member of the school's chapter of the Health Occupations Students of America, Ponte has volunteered locally at various elementary schools by teaching and creating science activities in addition to supporting animal care initiatives at Watermelon Ranch, a no-kill shelter. He has also donated his time fundraising for the UNM Children's Hospital. "Nicholas Ponte ran the table against in-state foes this past season, but truly surprised when crossing state lines," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Seeing him dazzle with a Top 25 finish at Nike Cross Southwest Regionals was wholly impressive as it occurred in a national hotbed of prep cross country talent."

Ponte has maintained a weighted 4.21 GPA in the classroom. He will attend Harvard University this fall, where he will run for the cross country and track teams.

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](https://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at [x.com/Gatorade](https://x.com/Gatorade).

###