

CARY ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Kavi Gibson of Cary Academy is the 2025-26 Gatorade North Carolina 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 Gibson as North Carolina'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, 125-pound senior won the NCISAA Class 4A state meet this past season with a time of 14:49.6, breaking the tape 9.8 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Chargers to a second-place team finish. Gibson took 10th at the Brooks Cross Country Championships to earn Second Team All-American honors and cap an unbeaten season against in-state runners. He also won the Eastern States Championship at the prestigious Manhattan College Invitational, clocking the seventh-fastest time in meet history.

The returning Gatorade State Player of the Year, Gibson has volunteered locally as one of the leaders in the Wilderness Club at Cary Academy, which offers students a chance to take a backpacking trip regardless of ability. The club has raised more than \$100,000 toward purchasing hiking gear for the cause. "Solidifying his standing as one of North Carolina's all-time prep greats, Kavi Gibson recorded an unbeaten ledger against in-state foes, capped by sensational showings in regional and national action, and becomes only the second two-time Gatorade Player of the Year selection in state history," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack.

Gibson has maintained an A average in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to run at Duke University 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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