

SOUTHLAKE CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE TEXAS 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 Caden Leonard of Southlake Carroll High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Texas 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 Leonard as Texas' 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, 148-pound senior became the first Texas runner in history to win three UIL Class 6A state titles this past season, clocking a time of 14:42 at the state meet and leading the Dragons to a seventh consecutive team championship. Leonard took third at both Nike Cross Nationals and the Brooks Cross Country Championships, earning dual First Team All-American honors in the process. Now a three-time Gatorade State Player of the Year winner, he was unbeaten on Texas soil last fall and ran a personal-best 14:29 in winning the UIL Class 6A District 04 Championship before going on to break the tape at the Nike Cross South Regional.

An avid hunter and fisherman, Leonard has volunteered locally on behalf of the Young Men's Service League, a nonprofit organization that initiates and encourages young men and their mothers to pursue philanthropic efforts in their community. He has also donated his time as a counselor at youth running camps and with the Special Olympics in addition to serving in youth ministry at White's Chapel Methodist Church. "Caden Leonard authored the most prolific prep distance career in state history," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "His resume includes becoming the state's first-ever Class 6A three-time state champion. A member of four state championship teams, all of which qualified for nationals, he possesses excellent competitiveness and leadership, which carried on the Southlake Carroll program's extraordinary tradition of success."

Leonard has maintained an A average 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 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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