

UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 Micah Gainer of University High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade West Virginia 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 Gainer as West Virginia'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, 135-pound sophomore won the Class 4A state meet this past season, leading the Hawks to the team title. Gainer also broke the tape at the UHS Season Opener to clock a personal-best time of 15:31.2. He was a 2025 Class 4A All-State selection.

Gainer has volunteered extensively on behalf of his local church community. He has also donated his time as a meet assistant for middle school track meets in addition to a community road race that benefits the Special Olympics. "Despite having his postseason cut short by injury, Micah Gainer showed himself to be a rising star in the state, clocking sub-16 efforts six times last fall," said Rich Gonzalez, editor of PrepCalTrack. "His win at states sparked University to their seventh straight team title and his individual academic prowess is just as impressive as his race season."

Gainer has maintained a weighted 4.17 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his junior 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.

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