

## **BLUE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS TRACK AND FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 25, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Maria Portela of Blue Valley High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Kansas Girls Track and Field 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 Portela as Kansas’ best high school girls track and field athlete and she joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Sanya Richards (2001-02, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Florida), Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone (2015-16 & 2016-17, Union Catholic Regional High School, New Jersey) and Jane Hedengren (2024-25, Timpview High School, Utah).

The 5-foot-7 junior sprinter set a wind-legal state record in the 100-meter dash in the qualifying round of the USATF Under-20 Championships this past season. Portela’s time of 11.39 seconds ranked No. 11 nationally among prep girls competitors in 2026. She also took third in the 200-meter dash and seventh in the 100 at U20s. In May, Portela tied the all-conditions state record in the 100, clocking an 11.38 at the Eastern Kansas League Championships. She swept all three sprinting events at the Class 6A state meet, setting meet records in the 100 and 200 and clocking a PR in the 400 (56.98). She ran a 23.30 in the 200 during state meet qualifying, which ranked No. 15 nationally this spring.

The manager of the Blue Valley High School tennis team in the fall, Portela is a student council representative and a member of her school’s Tiger Pride Club. She has volunteered locally playing bingo with senior citizens in addition to donating her time as a youth track coach. “Maria had one of the most impressive seasons I’ve seen from an athlete in 19 years coaching in Kansas,” said Aaron Davidson, head coach of Blue Valley West High School. “She was on another level compared to the competition. They could have put her in any event they wanted and she would have competed for a state title.”

Portela has maintained a weighted 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her senior 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](http://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://x.com/Gatorade).

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