

CENTRAL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE ILLINOIS BOYS TRACK AND FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (June 26, 2026) — In its 41st year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Isaiah Whitaker of Central Catholic High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Illinois Boys 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 Whitaker as Illinois’ best high school boys track and field athlete and he joins an elite legacy that spans professional athletes and coaches to CEOs, such as Alan Webb (2000-01, South Lakes High School, Virginia), Kerron Clement (2002-03, Laporte High School, Texas) and Tate Taylor (2024-25, Harlan High School, Texas).

The state’s returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 6-foot-2, 170-pound senior pole vaulter won the national title at the Nike Outdoor Nationals this past season. Whitaker cleared 18 feet, 0 inches, a clearance that ranked No. 2 nationally among prep boys competitors this spring and No. 16 in prep history. The runner-up in the pole vault at the USATF Under-20 Championships, he also won the pole vault at the Class 2A state meet with a meet-record clearance of 17-8.5. He soared 18 feet during the indoor season, just one inch shy of his own indoor state record set in 2025.

A member of the Central Catholic National Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta mathematics honor society, Whitaker has volunteered locally feeding the hungry on behalf of both the Midwest Food Bank and the Tinervin Family Foundation. He has also donated his time as a youth pole-vaulting coach. “It’s the end of an era at Central Catholic High School track and field,” said Sean Clark, head coach of Central Catholic High School. “He helped do whatever was necessary to score points at our conference meet, including running the open 400. We’re so proud of Isaiah’s accomplishments and he’ll be missed for his warrior team spirit.”

Whitaker has maintained a 3.55 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to compete at the University of Kentucky 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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