

**RANDALL K. COOPER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE KENTUCKY BOYS TRACK AND FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 26, 2026) — In its 41<sup>st</sup> year celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Paul Van Laningham of Randall K. Cooper High School is the 2025-26 Gatorade Kentucky 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 Van Laningham as Kentucky’s 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 5-foot-7, 125-pound senior distance talent finished fifth in the mile at the Brooks PR Invitational this past season with a state-record time of 4:01.83, which ranked No. 10 nationally among prep boys competitors this spring. The 2025-26 Gatorade Boys Cross Country Player of the Year, Van Laningham won the 1,600-meter run at the Class 3A state meet and finished as runner-up in both the 800 and 3,200. He also finished in the Top 10 in both the mile and 2-mile run at Nike Outdoor Nationals and his 2-mile time of 8:49.95 ranked No. 11 nationally.

A member of the freshmen mentor program at Cooper High School, Van Laningham has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through his church youth group. “Paul is something special, to put it mildly,” said Jon Erickson, head coach of Ryle High School. “Any time he was in a race, it felt like everyone around took note because they knew how good he is. It was fun to watch him compete.”

Van Laningham has maintained a weighted 4.62 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a written letter of athletic aid to compete at the University of Wisconsin 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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