

**VESTAVIA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 10, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Ethan Strand of Vestavia Hills High School as its 2019-20 Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Strand is the second Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Vestavia Hills High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the field, distinguishes Strand as Alabama's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in February, Strand joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg High School, Orland Park, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester High School, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-9, 130-pound junior raced to the Class 7A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:18.58, leading the Rebels to second place as a team. Strand finished sixth at the Foot Locker South Regional championships and crossed the line 29th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships. He also won at the Jesse Owens Classic and the Southern Showcase in 2019.

Strand has volunteered locally on behalf of Rebels Impact through Service and Engagement (RISE), a service-learning initiative at his school. "Ethan is always at his best when there is a lot at stake for his team and himself," said Vestavia Hills coach Brett Huber. "He had several goals this past fall—repeat as state champion, improve in times and training level, qualify for Foot Locker nationals—and he met all of those. He's a special runner."

Strand has maintained a 4.08 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior year of high school this fall.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track and field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Strand joins recent Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year Will Stone (2018-19, 2017-18 & 2016-17, Homewood High School), Cole Stidfole (2015-16, Oak Mountain High School) and Ben Bryant (2014-15, Opelika High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Strand has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of his choosing. He is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit www.Gatorade.com/POY, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.