

HILO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE HAWAII GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 22, 2024) — In its 39th year of honoring the nation's most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced Kekai Hulali Halpern of Hilo High School is the 2023-24 Gatorade Hawaii Girls Cross Country Player of the Year. Halpern is the first Gatorade Hawaii Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Hilo High School.

The award, which celebrates the nation's top high school athletes for excellence on the field, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Halpern as Hawaii's best high school girls cross country player. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport, touting an all-star group of alumni that includes Irene Riggs (2022-23, 2021-22 & 2020-21, Morgantown High School, Morgantown, W. Va.), Katelyn Tuohy (2019-20, 2018-19 & 2017-18, North Rockland High School, Thiels, N.Y.) and Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.).

The 5-foot-1 junior won the state meet this past season with a time of 19:25.56, breaking the tape 44.29 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Vikings to a ninth-place finish as a team. Halpern won five of the six races she entered and was the top Hawaii finisher in the one race she did not win.

Halpern has volunteered locally as the co-chair of the Hilo High School Jingle Bell Fun Run. She has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through both her school's National Honor Society and Key Club. "Hulali won the state championship race in an utterly dominating fashion," said Kimo Higgins, head coach of Hawaii Preparatory Academy. "The result was never in doubt."

Halpern has maintained a 3.93 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 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 & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. 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 state winners in each sport.

Halpern joins recent Gatorade Hawaii Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Zola O'Donnell (2022-23, Mililani High School), Kaylee Volner (2021-22, Seabury Hall), and Emily Naylor (2020-21 & 2019-20, Kalaheo High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$4.9 million across more than 1,600 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 Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY, Instagram at instagram.com/Gatorade and Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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