

KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MISSOURI BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (February 11, 2019) — In its 34th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Christian Baker of Kirkwood High School** as its **2018-19 Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Baker is the first Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Kirkwood 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 Baker as Missouri'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, Baker joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg, Orland Park High School, Ill.), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-11, 140-pound senior won the MHSAA Class 4 individual state championship this past season, breaking the tape with a time of 15:42.03 and leading the Pioneers to a fifth-place finish as a team. Baker clocked the fastest all-class time at the state meet and was unbeaten by a Missouri runner through the regular season and state championships. The St. Louis Post Dispatch Runner of the Year, he won seven of nine races during the 2018 campaign and was the state's top finisher when he took fifth (15:44.00) in the El Caliente Division of the Chile Pepper XC Festival in Arkansas. He clocked a personal-best 15:22.20 for 5K at the Class 4, District 2 meet.

A photographer for the Kirkwood Call student newspaper and a baritone in the Kirkwood Pioneer Pride marching band and concert band, Baker is a member of the Saint Peter Catholic Church K-Life youth group and has volunteered on behalf of the Special Olympics. "Christian Baker is an outstanding human being, student and athlete," said Kirkwood head coach Wayne Baldwin. "He is committed to his family, academic performance and running. He is a determined and tenacious athlete who's willing to sacrifice and do the hard work required to reach his goals. It's been my pleasure to be his high school coach."

Baker has maintained a 3.73 GPA in the classroom. He remains undecided on a collegiate destination.

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. 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.

Baker joins Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Victor Mugeche (2017-18, Blue Springs High School), Austin Hindman (2016-17, Lafayette High School), Ben Naeger (2015-16, Ste. Genevieve High School), Michael Karls (2014-15, Festus High School), and Noah Kauppila (2013-14, Marquette High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Baker 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.