

**RENO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEVADA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 27, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation’s best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Penelope Smerdon of Reno High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Smerdon is the first Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Reno 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 Smerdon as Nevada’s best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in February, Smerdon 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-6 junior raced to the Class 4A individual state championship this past season with a time of 19:29, leading the Huskies to second place as a team. Smerdon also won the Northern Region championships, the Douglas Class Races and the Del Oro Invitational. She took 26th at the Foot Locker West Regional championships.

A math tutor in her school, Smerdon has served as a mentor for youth runners. “Penelope Smerdon is one of the best student-athletes I’ve ever coached,” said Reno coach Jim Parker. “She sets a high standard for all of her teammates with her work ethic in both practice and in competition.”

Smerdon has maintained a 4.05 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 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.

Smerdon joins recent Gatorade Nevada Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year Carissa Buchholz (2018-19, South Lake Tahoe High School), Alexis Melendrez (2017-18, Spanish Springs High School), Samantha King-Shaw (2016-17, Reed High School), Alexis Gourrier (2015-16, Centennial High School) and Skyler Flora (2014-15, Tahoe Truckee High School), among the state’s list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade’s cause marketing platform “Play it Forward,” Smerdon has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of her choosing. She 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](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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