

KEENE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NEW HAMPSHIRE 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 Jake Velazquez of Keene High School as its 2019-20 Gatorade New Hampshire Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Velazquez is the first Gatorade New Hampshire Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Keene 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 Velazquez as New Hampshire'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, Velazquez 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-7, 138-pound senior distance talent won the NHIAA Meet of Champions this past season, breaking the tape in a personal-best 15:12.50 and leading the Blackbirds to a fourth-place finish as a team. Velazquez also won the Division 1 state meet, finishing 14.5 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor to help Keene capture state divisional runner-up honors. The teen's winning MOC time was the second-fastest in meet history and his D1 championship run was the fifth-fastest in meet history. A two-time New England All Star and All-State selection, he closed out 2019 with a seventh-place finish at the New England Cross Country Championship in 15:47, sparking his team to seventh place in the region.

A pianist, soloist and amateur composer, Velazquez has played in the Keene High band in addition to singing in the a capella and all-school choirs as well as performing in school musical theater productions and at a nursing home. He has volunteered locally as a counselor at summer youth cross country and track camps for three years running. Velazquez has also donated his time on behalf of Summer Track Nights with the City of Keene, as an official for two Memorial XC and track invitational events, and as a youth coach with the Elm City Track Club, where he prepared competitors for the 2019 Junior Olympics. "Jake embodies true grit, determination and perseverance," said David Goldsmith, head coach at Keene High. "He's endowed with exceptional physical talent, but he's achieved through focused, hard work and attentiveness to coaching. He's like no other athlete I've had the opportunity to coach over a 37-year career. His mental preparation, his ability to accommodate high levels of stressful physical training and his unique ability to lead by both performance and inspiration have combined to make him a truly talented student-athlete."

Velazquez has maintained a 3.57 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at UMass-Lowell 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.

Velazquez joins recent Gatorade New Hampshire Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year Forest MacKenzie (2018-19 & (2017-18, Concord High School), Patrick O'Brien (2016-17, Oyster River High School), Cameron Daly (2015-16, Inter-Lakes High School) and Eli Moskowitz (2014-15, Souhegan High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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

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