

**VIRGINIA EPISCOPAL SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE VIRGINIA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 10, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Daniel O'Brien of Virginia Episcopal School as its 2019-20 Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. O'Brien is the first Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Virginia Episcopal 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 O'Brien as Virginia'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, O'Brien 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-10, 135-pound senior repeated as Virginia Independent School Division 2 state champion this past season breaking the tape with a time of 15:11.7, 40 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and led the Bishops to a first-place finish as a team. The state's returning Gatorade Runner of the Year, O'Brien took fifth at the Foot Locker South Regional championships and he captured seventh at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships to earn All-American status for the second year in a row. He did not lose to an in-state runner all season.

O'Brien has volunteered as his dorm's residential assistant and donated his time on behalf of multiple community service initiatives through his church. "Daniel was totally in a class by himself," said Rich Higgins, head coach of Walsingham Academy. "Even in major meets involving all sizes of schools, he was rarely pushed."

O'Brien has maintained an A average in the classroom. He has made a verbal commitment to attend Princeton University, where he will run for the cross country and track teams, beginning 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.

Two-time winner O'Brien joins Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year Sam Affolder (2017-18, Loudoun Valley High School), Waleed Suliman (2016-17, Douglas Freeman High School), Drew Hunter (2015-16, Loudoun Valley High School) and Andrew Hunter (2014-15, Loudoun Valley High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," O'Brien 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](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).