

**WINTER SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE FLORIDA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (April 8, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Caroline Wells of Winter Springs High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Player of the Year. Wells is the first Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Winter Springs 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 Wells as Florida's best high school girls cross country player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Player of the Year award to be announced in April, Wells joins an elite alumni association of 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-1 junior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:16.5, leading the Bears to the state title as a team. Wells also won the District 6 championship, the Region 2 championship and the FSU Pre-State Invitational. She took seventh at the AAU National Championships.

Wells has volunteered locally on behalf of youth running programs, a vacation bible camp and an elementary school reading program. "Caroline Wells combines natural talent with a world class work ethic that's beyond her years," said Winter Springs coach Octavius Clark. "It has been a joy coaching someone who is usually 15 minutes early to train and always the last one to leave."

Wells has maintained an A average 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 work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Wells joins recent Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Alyssa Hendrix (2019-20, Riverview High School), Tsion Yared (2018-19, Pine Crest School), Ana Wallace (2017-18, Chiles High School) and Bailey Hertenstein (2016-17, Riverview High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Wells has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Wells is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization they chose is deserving of one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants, which will be announced throughout the year. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$2.7 million across 1,117 organizations.

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.playeroftheyear.gatorade.com, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.

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