

**LATIN SCHOOL OF CHICAGO STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ILLINOIS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (April 8, 2021) — In its 36<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Ava Parekh of Latin School of Chicago as its 2020-21 Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Player of the Year. Parekh is the first Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Latin School of Chicago.

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 Parekh as Illinois'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, Parekh 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-4 junior raced to first place at the Division 2 ShaZam Cross Country Championships this past season with a time of 17:39.2. Parekh also won the regional championship, the sectional championship and the Whitney Young Invitational. She took third at the national XC Town USA Meet of Champions in 17:36 and finished third at the Nike Cross Virtual Championships.

Parekh has volunteered locally on behalf of youth track programs, a food pantry and a homeless shelter. "Ava works diligently every single day to improve herself and our team," said Latin School coach Dan Daly. "It's been wonderful to watch an athlete with natural talent recognize the gift and not squander it."

Parekh 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 works with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Parekh joins recent Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Katelynne Hart (2019-20, 2018-2019 & 2017-2018, Glenbard West High School) and Anna Sophia Keller (2016-17, St. Anthony High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Parekh has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Parekh 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](http://www.playeroftheyear.gatorade.com), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](https://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).

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