

**MORGANTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 Irene Riggs of Morgantown High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Player of the Year. Riggs is the second Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Morgantown 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 Riggs as West Virginia'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, Riggs 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-7 sophomore won the Class AAA state meet this past season with a time of 17:59.82, breaking the tape 29.06 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Mohigans to the state team title. Undeclared during the 2020 campaign, Riggs set a personal record over 5K at the UHS Covid Classic with her time of 17:51.3, winning the race by more than a minute.

The vice president of her class at Morgantown High, Riggs has volunteered locally as part of fundraising campaigns to benefit the WVU Medicine Children's Hospital, and she has also donated her time as a youth swimming coach. "Irene dominated every race she ran this season," said Ed Frohnepfel, head coach of University High. "She had the talent, mentally and physically to stay focused to be the best and that's what made her such a special runner this season."

Riggs has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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.

Riggs joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Lea Hatcher (2019-20, Morgantown High School), Madison Trippett (2018-19, Parkersburg High School), Tori Starcher (2017-18, Ripley High School), and TaShala Turner (2016-17, University High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Riggs has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of her choosing. Riggs is also eligible to submit a 30-second video explaining why the organization she 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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