

**VESTAVIA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (April 15, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced Ethan Strand of Vestavia Hills High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Strand is the first Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Vestavia Hills 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 Strand as Alabama's best high school boys cross country player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Player of the Year award to be announced in April, Strand 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-9, 130-pound senior won the Southern Showcase this past season with a state record time of 14:36.9. Alabama's returning Gatorade Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, Strand also won the Jesse Owens Classic and the Section 3 championship. He took 14th at the RunningLane National Championships.

Strand has volunteered locally on behalf of Rebels Impact through Service and Engagement (RISE), a service learning project at his school. "Ethan has had a special cross country career, and his future is very bright," said Vestavia Hills coach Brett Huber. "He had a record-breaking senior year, setting new records for the fastest boys time at the state course in Moulton at the Jesse Owens Invitational, and the fastest time in Alabama history, at the Southern Showcase."

Strand has maintained a 4.15 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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.

Two-time winner Strand joins recent Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Player of the Year Will Stone (2018-19, 2017-18 & 2016-17, Homewood High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Strand has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Strand 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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