

**MADISONVILLE-NORTH HOPKINS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE KENTUCKY 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 Jackson Watts of Madisonville-North Hopkins High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Watts is the first Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Madisonville-North Hopkins 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 Watts as Kentucky'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, Watts 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 6-foot, 135-pound senior won the Class AAA state meet this past season with a time of 15:41.83, leading the Maroons to an 11th-place finish as a team. Watts finished 19th at the XC Town USA Meet of Champions and placed 29th at the RunningLane National Championships. He is a two-time All-State selection and the 2020 Kentucky Track and Cross Country Coaches Association Runner of the Year.

A member of the Madison-North Hopkins High Key Club and Beta Club, Watts has volunteered with his local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and he has donated his time to a Youth Group Ministry. "I have had the opportunity to watch Jackson really blossom the past four years," said Mark Fortney, head coach of Daviess County High. "Tons of hard work went into his progress as a senior. His focus was spot-on and he set a goal to be the best he could become and achieved that and more."

Watts has maintained a weighted 4.05 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at the University of Kentucky 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.

Watts joins recent Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Conner O'Shea (2019-20, Madison Central High School), Keeton Thornsberry (2018-19 & 2017-18, Holy Cross High School), and Yared Nuguse (2016-17, duPont Manual High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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