

**HOPE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO 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 Rendon Kuykendall of Hope Christian High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Kuykendall is the first Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Hope Christian 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 Kuykendall as New Mexico'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, Kuykendall 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-8, 125-pound sophomore won the Class 4A state meet this spring with a time of 15:17.84, breaking the tape 10.53 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Huskies to the team title. Kuykendall also won the Rio Rancho Invitational during the abbreviated spring season. Last fall, Kuykendall was the state's top finisher at the prestigious Desert Twilight Festival and Kokopelli Invitational, and he placed 34th at the 2020 RunningLane National Championships.

A member of the Hope Christian High National Honor Society, Kuykendall has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through his church. "Rendon is a model leader in our program and has been, even as a freshman," said Shane Cleveland, head coach of Hope Christian High. "I can always count on him to be at every single practice rain or shine. We are a blessed staff to have a fine young man such as Rendon in our program."

Kuykendall has maintained a weighted 4.56 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his 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.

Kuykendall joins recent Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Galvin Curley (2019-20, Navajo Pine High School), Kashon Harrison (2018-19 & 2017-18, Kirtland Central High School), and Jordan Lesensee (2016-17, Albuquerque Academy), among the state's list of former award winners.

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