

**ARDREY KELL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Murphy Smith of Ardrey Kell High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Smith is the first Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Ardrey Kell 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 Smith as North Carolina'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, Smith 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-11-inch, 145-pound senior distance talent won the NCHSAA 4A state title this past season, breaking the tape with a time of 15:44.65 and leading the Knights to third place as a team. A two-time All-State selection, Smith was also the state's top finisher at the RunningLane National Cross Country Championships, crossing the line in a personal-best 15:07.98 (47th overall), which was the fastest 5K time by a North Carolina prep boy in 2020. His state meet speed rating according to Dyestat and TullyRunners.com ranked No. 88 among the nation's Top 100 fastest competitors.

A member of his school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, Smith has also volunteered on behalf of the Ardrey Kell student service club Knights in Action. He has performed nearly 100 hours of community service for causes such as the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, the Carolina Thread Trail, the Pineville Neighbors Place, Hands on Charlotte and the Isabella Santos Foundation. He has also donated his time to Promising Pages, Ballantyne Elementary School, Classroom Central, the Polo Ridge PTA, the Running Works program for the homeless and the United Way, in addition to serving as a youth track meet official and as a peer tutor. "I can't think of a better candidate for Gatorade Player of the Year," said Providence High School head coach Steve Touranjoe. "I've had the opportunity to watch Murphy compete for four years. He has a work ethic like no other and his dedication and commitment to running exceeds anyone's expectations. He's grown a great deal as a runner and as a person. I also admire his enthusiasm to inspire and lead his teammates, especially during these unprecedented times."

Smith has maintained a weighted 4.43 GPA in the classroom. He will attend the US Naval Academy this fall, where he will compete in cross country and track.

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.

Smith joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Ian Harrison (2019-20, Panther Creek High School), Anton Idhammar (2018-19, Cary High School), John Tatter (2017-18, R.J. Reynolds High School), and Connor Lane (2016-17, Cardinal Gibbons High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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