

**CATAWBA RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH 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 Sam Rich of Catawba Ridge High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Rich is the first Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Catawba Ridge 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 Rich as South 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, Rich 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-1, 145-pound junior raced to the Class 4A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:08.07. Rich also won the Region 3 championship, the Lakelands Invitational, the George Moss Classic and the York County championship. He took 23rd at the RunningLane National Championships.

A devoted member of his church community, Rich has volunteered locally on behalf of a youth soccer program. "Sam Rich is one of the most gifted athletes I've come across," said Catawba Ridge coach David Helms. "From the outside he seems like a quiet, laidback runner, but he's a real competitor and shows his leadership and talent via his actions on the course."

Rich has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior 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.

Rich joins recent Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Coen Roberts (2019-20, Greer High School), Colin Baker (2018-19, Academic Magnet High School), Wynn Johnson (2017-18, Dorman High School), and John Ward (2016-17, Wade Hampton High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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