

**UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 Josh Edwards of University High School as its 2020-21 Gatorade West Virginia Boys Cross Country Player of the Year. Edwards is the third Gatorade West Virginia Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from University 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 Edwards as West Virginia'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, Edwards 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-7, 125-pound junior won his second-straight Class AAA state meet this past season with a time of 15:25.48, breaking the tape 49.64 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Hawks to a first place finish as a team. Edwards was unbeaten against high school-age competitors in 2020 and ran a personal-best 15:00.2 at the Kernstown Battlefield Course in Winchester, Va. He finished the season ranked No. 8 in the country by MileSplit.com.

Edwards has volunteered locally with the Special Olympics and as a youth running coach. "When someone is looking at Josh Edwards, he can't really be looked at through the lens of the present day, only through that of history," said Jacob Galik, head coach of Wheeling Park High. "In every race I saw him run this year, his degree of fitness and excellence was truly staggering. He is on the shortlist for the best that I have ever seen in our state."

Edwards has maintained a 3.97 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.

Two-time winner Edwards joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Aaron Withrow (2018-19, Winfield High School), Chris Barbera (2017-18, Woodrow Wilson High School), and Philip White (2016-17, University High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

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