

**VESTAVIA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (July 8, 2021) — In its 36th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Ethan Strand of Vestavia Hills High School** as its **2020-21 Gatorade Alabama Boys Track & Field Player of the Year**. Strand is the first Gatorade Alabama Boys Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Vestavia Hills 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 Strand as Alabama's best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Strand joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 5-foot-9, 130-pound senior swept the 800-, 1600- and 3200-meter runs at the Class 7A state meet this past season, helping the Rebels win the state team title. Alabama's two-time returning Gatorade Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, Strand clocked personal-best times in five events this past season, including the 800 (1:52.73), the 1600 (4:11.77), the mile (4:07.90), the 3200 (9:12.88) and the two-mile (8:59.90). At the time of his selection, he ranked among the nation's Top 20 2021 prep competitors in two events, including No. 7 in the 2-mile and No. 17 in the mile, as well as No. 67 in the 800 and No. 76 in the 1600. Also rated No. 48 in the national MileSplit 50, he concluded his prep career ranked No. 1 in state history in the 2-mile and No. 3 in the mile, according to MileSplit.com.

Strand has volunteered locally on behalf of Rebels Impact through Service and Engagement (RISE), a service-learning project at his school. "Ethan had an outstanding career and senior year," said Vestavia Hills head coach Brett Huber. "He demonstrated leadership in a way that was really remarkable this season, putting his teammates above himself. In terms of training and performance, this was the best balancing act of his career and we're awfully proud of what he's accomplished."

Strand has maintained a 4.17 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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.

Strand joins recent Gatorade Alabama Boys Track & Field Players of the Year Josiah Harry (2019-20, Mobile Christian School), Charles Lewis (2018-19, Sparkman High School), Marion Humphrey (2017-18, Hoover High School), and Trey Cunningham (2016-17, Winfield City High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Through Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Strand has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of their choosing. Strand 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 playeroftheyear.gatorade.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.