

**DESERT VISTA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ARIZONA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 24, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Lauren Ping** of **Desert Vista High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Ping is the second Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Desert Vista 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 Ping as Arizona's best high school girls cross country player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Player of the Year award to be announced in February, Ping 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-9 junior raced to the Division 1 individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:39.4, leading the Thunder to second place as a team. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year in girls cross country, Ping also won the Nike Cross Southwest Regional Championships in 17:15.3. She placed fifth at the Eastbay West Regional Championships and 22nd at the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships. She also finished first at the Desert Twilight Festival and the Peaks Invitational.

Ping has volunteered locally on behalf of a youth running camp. "Lauren Ping is a talented and dedicated athlete who performs her best in the most competitive situations," said Bryan Idleman, head coach at Perry High School. "She's not only a top-level national talent, but she's also a really good person."

Ping has maintained a weighted 4.16 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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 leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Three-time winner Ping joins recent Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Abi Archer (2018-19, Chaparral High School), and Maya Smith (2017-18, Northland Preparatory Academy), among the state's list of former award winners.

Gatorade has a long-standing history of serving athlete communities and understands how sports instill valuable lifelong skills on and off the field. Through Gatorade's "Play it Forward" platform, Ping has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national organization of their choosing that helps young athletes realize the benefits of playing sports. Ping is also eligible to submit a short 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 \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 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 or follow us on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY, Instagram at instagram.com/Gatorade and Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.