

**LAKE HAMILTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ARKANSAS 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 **Olivia Pielemeier** of **Lake Hamilton High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Pielemeier is the second Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Lake Hamilton 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 Pielemeier as Arkansas'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, Pielemeier 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-7 junior won the Class 5A state meet this past season with a time of 18:44.61, breaking the tape 16.01 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Wolves to a third-place finish as a team. Pielemeier was unbeaten against in-state competition. She took second at the Arkansas vs. Oklahoma All-Star Meet.

Pielemeier has volunteered locally on a fundraising campaign to benefit the American Heart Association, and she has donated her time at a homeless shelter in Hot Springs. "I have watched Olivia with envy for years," said Jeff Haynes, head coach of Lakeside High School. "She is one of the most dedicated and talented runners I have seen perform."

Pielemeier has maintained a 3.88 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.

Pielemeier joins recent Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Mia Loafman (2020-21, Rogers High School), Ali Nachtigal (2019-20 & 2018-19, Rogers High School), and Josie Carson (2017-18, Lake Hamilton High School), 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, Pielemeier 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. Pielemeier 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.