

**WINTER SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE FLORIDA 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 **Caroline Wells** of **Winter Springs High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Wells is the first Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Winter Springs 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 Wells as Florida'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, Wells 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-2 senior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 16:56.6. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year in girls cross country, Wells also won the District 3 championship, the Region 2 championship, the Astronaut Invitational and the FSU Pre-State Invitational. She took fifth at the Eastbay South Regional Championships and 10th at the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships, earning All-American honors in the process. She also clocked the state's fastest 5K time in history by prep girl when she broke the tape in 16:40.2 at the Hagerty Invitational.

Wells has volunteered locally on behalf of youth running programs, a Vacation Bible camp and an elementary school reading initiative. "Caroline's drive and determination cannot be measured by any imaginable yardstick," said Winter Springs High School coach Octavius Clark. "Break the mold right now, because she can't be recreated. If I coached another 25 years, I would never have another Caroline."

Wells has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Stanford University 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.

Two-time winner Wells joins recent Gatorade Florida Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Alyssa Hendrix (2019-20, Riverview High School), Tsion Yared (2018-19, Pine Crest School), and Ana Wallace (2017-18, Chiles 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, Wells 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. Wells 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.

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