

**MARY INSTITUTE AND SAINT LOUIS COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 **Julia Ray** of **Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day School (MICDS)** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Ray is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from MICDS.

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 Ray as Missouri'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, Ray 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-5 junior distance talent was the top Missouri finisher at the Eastbay Midwest Region Cross Country Championships this past season, clocking a time of 18:07.20 on the 5K course. A 2021 All-Metro First Team selection, Ray was also the state's top runner at the Nike XC Town Twilight Invitational (5th overall) and the Rick Weinheimer Cross Country Classic, where she crossed the line in second with a personal-best time of 17:52.80, which ranked as the state's third-fastest clocking by a prep girl in 2021. She took fourth at the MSHSAA Class 5 State XC Championships with a time of 18:00.00. Ray also chalked up victories at the Fort Zumwalt North Twilight Invitational, the Forest Park Invitational and the MSHSAA District 1 championships.

An active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter at MICDS, Ray has volunteered locally for the House Rabbit Society of Missouri. "Julia Ray is one of the fiercest competitors in the state," said Liberty High School (Wentzville) head coach Toby Glavin. "Every time she lines up, you know she's racing to win. You also know she is going to give her absolute best that day."

Ray has maintained a 3.66 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.

Ray joins recent Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Ally Kruger (2020-21, Liberty High School), Carolyn Ford (2019-20, Rock Bridge High School), Ginger Murnieks (2018-19, Lee's Summit West High School), and Tori Findley (2017-18, Blue Springs South 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, Ray 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. Ray 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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