

**LAKELAND REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW JERSEY 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 **Angelina Perez** of **Lakeland Regional High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Perez is the first Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Lakeland Regional 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 Perez as New Jersey'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, Perez 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-3 senior raced to the individual title at the state Meet of Champions this past season with a time of 17:09. Perez also took second at the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships in 17:19.7 to earn All-American honors and broke the tape at the Eastbay Northeast Regional Championships in 17:21.5. She also won the Group 2 state meet, the Shore Coaches Classic and the Six Flags Wild Safari Invitational. Perez's winning time of 16:44 at the Big North Championships was the fastest 5K in New Jersey history by a prep girl.

Perez has raised funds to benefit breast cancer research and mental health awareness, and has volunteered locally on behalf of the public library, trail clean-up initiatives and charity road races. "I felt like I had a senior leader from the first day Angelina walked into Lakeland," said Lakeland Regional High School coach Damiano Conforti. "She has an unparalleled work ethic, and she gets her mind and body in sync with a rigid, plant-based diet. The combination of diet with her outstanding training sets her apart from the competition."

Perez has maintained a weighted 4.29 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at the University of Florida 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.

Perez joins recent Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Charlotte Bednar (2020-21 & 2019-20, The Lawrenceville School), Abby Loveys (2018-19, Randolph High School), and Monica Hebner (2017-18, Northern Highlands Regional 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, Perez 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. Perez 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.

###