

**APEX HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 24, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Sarah Mitchell** of **Apex High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Mitchell is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Apex 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 Mitchell as North Carolina'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, Mitchell 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 senior distance talent broke the tape at the NCHSAA 4A State Championships to win the individual title with a time of 17:26.96—the fastest all-class clocking of the state postseason. Mitchell also finished 46th in the national Garmin RunningLane Cross Country Championships Gold race, clocking a personal-best time of 17:26.40 on the 5K course to set an Apex High school record. A two-time SWAC Runner of the Year and a 2021 NCHSAA 4A All-State selection, she won eight of the 10 meets she entered in 2021.

Mitchell has volunteered extensively on behalf of her church, including participating in community clean-ups, school-supply drives and meal deliveries, among other philanthropic endeavors. Her family has spent several weeks in the Middle East during the course of multiple visits to help improve the quality of life for people living in low-income areas. Her most recent trip was during the remote learning period of her junior year when she spent several weeks in Pakistan working alongside and befriending local officials and citizens. While in Pakistan, Mitchell attended and participated in her online classes, but also spent time in the Pakistani community, exploring the surrounding areas, hiking local trails and experiencing the culture. These journeys have instilled in her an interest in pursuing a career in public policy. "A state runner-up as a freshman at the independent school level with Grace Christian, Sarah Mitchell broke through in the public school ranks this past season, winning the 4A title," said Erik Boal, an editor for DyeStat. "She ran her fastest times of the 2021 campaign in her last four races, setting an anticipatory tone for outdoor track this spring. George Washington is getting a good one."

Mitchell has maintained a 4.5 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at George Washington 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.

Mitchell joins recent Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Carmen Alder (2020-21, 2019-20, & 2018-19, Pinecrest High School) and Mariah Howlett (2017-18, Lake Norman Charter 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, Mitchell 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. Mitchell 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com) or follow us on social media on Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://facebook.com/GatoradePOY), Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://instagram.com/Gatorade) and Twitter at [twitter.com/Gatorade](https://twitter.com/Gatorade).

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