

**BIXBY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE OKLAHOMA 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 **Cayden Dawson** of **Bixby High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Oklahoma Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Dawson is the first Gatorade Oklahoma Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Bixby 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 Dawson as Oklahoma'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, Dawson 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 became the first Oklahoma female runner to break the 17-minute mark in a five-kilometer race as she finished 14th at the national Garmin RunningLane Cross Country Championship to earn All-American honors this past season. Dawson also took second at the Class 6A state meet and was the winner of the 17-18-year-old age group at the Cross Country Coaches National Youth Championships. Also a member of the Spartans track team, she set a state record in the 3,200-meter run as a junior.

A four-year member of the Bixby High Student Council, Dawson has volunteered locally as a running mentor, and she has donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church. "Cayden leads by example," said Mike Stanton, head coach of Bixby High School. "She has been so dedicated to the sport and her team over the past four years. Running is her passion."

Dawson has maintained a weighted 4.50 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Oklahoma State 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.

Dawson joins recent Gatorade Oklahoma Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Payton Hinkle (2020-21 & 2019-20, Broken Arrow High School), Sophia Maag (2018-19, Norman High School), and Rilee Rigdon (2017-18, Bartlesville 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, Dawson 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. Dawson 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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