

**O'GORMAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH DAKOTA 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 **Alea Hardie** of **O'Gorman High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Hardie is the second Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from O'Gorman 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 Hardie as South Dakota'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, Hardie 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-4 senior won her second-straight Division AA state meet this past season with a time of 17:31.28, breaking the tape 10.32 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Knights to their third-straight first-place finish as a team. Hardie won five of the eight races she entered. She closed out her prep career with a personal-best time of 17:27.4 to place fifth at the Nike Cross Heartland Regional Championships.

Hardie has volunteered locally at the Siouxland Libraries and she has also donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church youth group. "Alea Hardie is one of the best female distance runners to ever come out of South Dakota," said Jesse Coy, head coach of Rapid City Stevens High School. "She always brings a championship performance when it matters most."

Hardie has maintained a 3.96 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at the University of Nebraska 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.

Hardie joins recent Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Katie Castelli (2020-21, O'Gorman High School), Ali Bainbridge (2019-20, Lennox High School), and Ellie Abraham (2018-19 & 2017-18, Brookings 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, Hardie 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. Hardie 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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