

**MORGANTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 **Irene Riggs** of **Morgantown High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Riggs is the second Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Morgantown 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 Riggs as West Virginia'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, Riggs 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 state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year, the 5-foot-7 junior won her second straight Class AAA state meet this past season with a time of 18:24.88, breaking the tape 34.81 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Mohigans to a first-place finish as a team. Riggs took eighth at the Eastbay South Regional Championships and finished 14th at the Eastbay Cross Country Championships, to earn All-American honors.

Vice president of her class at Morgantown High School for three years, Riggs has volunteered locally as part of fundraising campaigns to benefit the WVU Medicine Children's Hospital, and she has donated her time as a youth swimming coach. "Irene is a gifted athlete with a tremendous work ethic," said Mike Ryan, head coach of Morgantown High School. "She is willing to train on her own in the offseason and finds time to do the little things."

Riggs has maintained a weighted 4.13 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.

Two-time winner Riggs joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Lea Hatcher (2019-20, Morgantown High School), Madison Trippett (2018-19, Parkersburg High School), and Tori Starcher (2017-18, Ripley 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, Riggs 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. Riggs 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.