

**SALESIANUM SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE DELAWARE BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 31, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Ryan Banko** of **Salesianum School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Delaware Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Banko is the second Gatorade Delaware Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Salesianum 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 Banko as Delaware's best high school boys cross country player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Player of the Year award to be announced in February, Banko 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-11, 140-pound senior raced to the Division 1 individual state championship this past season with a time of 16:35.8, leading the Sallies to the state title as a team. Banko also won the Joe O'Neill Invitational and the New Castle County championship. He took second in the Varsity F race at the prestigious Manhattan College Invitational.

Banko has served as an elementary school tutor and has volunteered locally on behalf of youth running programs. "From Ryan's first day as a freshman, we knew that he was going to be a special athlete," said Salesianum High School coach Scott Davis. "He possessed a level of drive and self-motivation that is seen in only a handful of runners."

Banko has maintained a 4.16 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Duke 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.

Banko joins recent Gatorade Delaware Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Declan McDonnell (2020-21, Tatnall School), Andrew Avila (2019-20, Charter School of Wilmington), and Connor Nisbet (2018-19, 2017-18 & 2016-17, Wilmington Friends 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, Banko 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. Banko 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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