

**IDAHO FALLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE IDAHO BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 31, 2022) — In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Luke Athay** of **Idaho Falls High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Idaho Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Athay is the first Gatorade Idaho Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Idaho Falls 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 Athay as Idaho'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, Athay 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 6-foot, 142-pound sophomore won the Class 5A state meet this past season with a time of 15:19.83, breaking the tape 17.2 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Tigers to a second-place finish as a team. Athay took third at the Eastbay West Regional Championships to qualify for the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships, where he placed 20th. He also finished sixth at the Nike Cross Northwest Regional Championships to earn First Team All-Region honors.

Athay has volunteered locally with the Hope Squad, a program designed to help with suicide prevention, and he has donated his time to multiple community service initiatives through his church youth group. "I've coached 30 years in the state of Idaho and can honestly say Luke is one of the most special talents ever to run in Southeast Idaho," said Brett Hill, head coach of Sugar Salem High School. "I've witnessed his incredible drive at many meets this year, but also his intelligent and tactical racing abilities."

Athay has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his junior 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.

Athay joins recent Gatorade Idaho Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Nathan Green (2020-21, 2019-20, & 2018-19, Borah High School), and Nicholas Russell (2017-18, Bishop Kelly 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, Athay 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. Athay 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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