

**LA SALLE INSTITUTE STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEW YORK 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 **Gitch Hayes** of **La Salle Institute** is the **2021-22 Gatorade New York Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Hayes is the first Gatorade New York Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from La Salle Institute.

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 Hayes as New York'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, Hayes 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, 145-pound senior raced to the Class B individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:37.1. Hayes also won the New York Federation Championships in 15:34.7, and took first at the Burnt Hills Invitational, the Section 2 Championships, the Colonial Council Championships and the Pre-States Invitational. He finished second in the Eastern States Championship race at the prestigious Manhattan College Invitational, took third at the Eastbay Northeast Regional Championships and was 17th at the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships.

Hayes has volunteered on behalf of Capital City Rescue Mission and has participated in Part of the Reach mission trips. He has also donated his time to Street Soldiers, which assists the homeless in the Albany region. "Gitch is a very talented runner who embodies all of the qualities a coach could want in a distance athlete," said La Salle Institute coach John Leonard. "On top of his work ethic—which is what has helped him become as successful as he has is—he is a smart racer. He almost never makes a tactical mistake."

Hayes has maintained an A average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at the University of North Carolina 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.

Hayes joins recent Gatorade New York Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Peyton Geehrer (2020-21, Fayetteville-Manlius High School), Sam Lawler (2019-20, Mendon High School), Parker Stokes (2018-19, Maine-Endwell High School), and Mason Gatewood (2017-18, St. Anthony's 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, Hayes 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. Hayes 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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