

**CATAWBA RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA 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 **Sam Rich** of **Catawba Ridge High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Rich is the first Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Catawba Ridge 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 Rich as South Carolina'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, Rich 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-2, 145-pound senior raced to the Class 4A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:20.9. The state's returning Gatorade Player of the Year in boys cross country, Rich also broke the tape at the Great American Cross Country Festival, the Southern Showcase and the Bob Jenkins SCTCCCA Coaches Classic.

A devoted member of his church community, Rich has donated his time as a math tutor and Vacation Bible School leader, and has also volunteered assisting the homeless. "Sam is a true student of the sport," said Catawba Ridge High School coach David Helms. "He is constantly analyzing situations, courses, opponents and his own training to become the best athlete he can be. He's a true talent, but an even better human being."

Rich has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at the University of Notre Dame 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 Rich joins recent Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Coen Roberts (2019-20, Greer High School), Colin Baker (2018-19, Academic Magnet High School), and Wynn Johnson (2017-18, Dorman 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, Rich 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. Rich 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.