

**STEVENS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH DAKOTA 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 **Simeon Birnbaum** of **Stevens High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade South Dakota Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Birnbaum is the first Gatorade South Dakota Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Stevens 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 Birnbaum as South Dakota'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, Birnbaum 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, 145-pound junior won the Class AA state meet this past season with a time of 15:48.64, breaking the tape 5.12 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Raiders to the team title. Birnbaum also took eighth at the Nike Cross Heartland Regional Championships and finished 16th at the Eastbay Midwest Regional Championships.

The first chair alto saxophone player in the Stevens High jazz band, Birnbaum has volunteered locally as part of multiple community service initiatives through his church youth group. "Simeon is a very talented runner," said Andy VanDeest, head coach of Spearfish High School. "He finds a way to win the race. He is very smart and strategic while he's racing."

Birnbaum has maintained a 3.86 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his 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.

Birnbaum joins recent Gatorade South Dakota Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Isaac Davelaar (2020-21, Sioux Falls Christian High School), Andrew Lauer (2019-20, Lincoln High School), Aaron Ryan (2018-19, Aberdeen Central High School), and Derick Peters (2017-18, West Central 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, Birnbaum 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. Birnbaum 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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