

**KNOXVILLE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE TENNESSEE 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 **Keegan Smith of Knoxville Catholic High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Tennessee Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Smith is the second Gatorade Tennessee Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Knoxville Catholic 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 Smith as Tennessee'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, Smith 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-8, 115-pound freshman won the Class AA, Division II state meet this past season with a time of 15:29.09, breaking the tape 24.28 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Fighting Irish to a fifth-place finish as a team. Smith set a national freshman record with his second-place finish in 14:53.79 at the 5K Southern Showcase in Huntsville, Ala., and he was the only freshman boy in the country to qualify for the national Eastbay Cross Country Championships, where he finished 35th. Prior to high school, he won 21 national championships in outdoor and indoor settings in association with the AAU, the Junior Olympics and the Track and Field Coalition of the United States. He still holds five age-specific national records.

A member of the Knoxville Catholic High student council, Smith has volunteered locally on behalf of the Knoxville Bridge Ministry and at the Columbus Home Children's Shelter and Assessment Center. He has also donated his time as part of multiple community service initiatives through his school's Rotary International Interact Club, which conducts "service above self" initiatives to benefit the community. "Keegan had a killer season," said Chelsea Osborne, head coach of Farragut High School. "To see him accomplish everything he did as a freshman was pretty amazing. He just has the drive to be the best."

Smith has maintained an A average in the classroom. He will begin his sophomore 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.

Smith joins recent Gatorade Tennessee Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Aiden Britt (2020-21, Lebanon High School), Silas Winders (2019-20, Henry County High School), Jake Renfree (2018-19, Knoxville Catholic High School), and Carter Coughlin (2017-18, Webb School of Knoxville), 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, Smith 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. Smith 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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