

**EDWARDSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ILLINOIS BOYS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (June 29, 2022) — In its 37<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Ryan Watts** of **Edwardsville High School** is the **2021-22 Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Player of the Year**. Watts is the third Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Edwardsville 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 Watts as Illinois' best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Player of the Year award to be announced in July, Watts joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2014-15 & 2013-14, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The 6-foot-5, 170-pound senior won the 1600-meter run and the 3200-meter run at the Class 3A state meet this past season, leading the Tigers to second place as a team. Watts broke the tape in the 1600 in 4:11.16 and the 3200 in 8:55.66. He was named the St. Louis Post-Dispatch Track and Field Athlete of the Year.

Watts has served as a tutor in his school system and volunteered locally on behalf of youth track camps. "His junior year, Ryan was placed in a protective boot due to a stress fracture in his foot and he was sidelined while his team finished fourth in the state," said Edwardsville High School coach Chad Lakatos. "Knowing he could have helped them to a state title if he'd been healthy really added fuel to the fire for his senior season. He took care of business this year, and he always seemed to put team accomplishments before his own."

Watts has maintained a 3.88 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Iowa State University 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.

Watts joins recent Gatorade Illinois Boys Track & Field Players of the Year Brandon Battle (2020-21, Edwardsville High School), Josh Methner (2019-20, John Hersey High School), and Marcellus Moore (2018-19 & 2017-18, Plainfield North 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, Watts 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. Watts 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).