

**OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MARYLAND GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 23, 2023) — In its 38<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Leah Stephens** of **Our Lady of Good Counsel High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Maryland Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Stephens is the first Gatorade Maryland Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Our Lady of Good Counsel 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 Stephens as Maryland's best high school girls cross country player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Player of the Year award to be announced in January, Stephens joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners, including Natalie Cook (2021-22, Flower Mound High School, Flower Mound, Texas), Katelyn Tuohy (2019-20, North Rockland High School, Thiels, N.Y.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester High School, Rochester Hills, Mich.) and Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.).

The 5-foot-3 senior raced to the Maryland Private Schools Large Schools division individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:00, leading the Falcons to a sixth-place finish as a team. Stephens also won the adidas XC Challenge in North Carolina and MileStat.com Invitational in Virginia. She finished fifth at the Champs Sports Northeast Regional Championships and earned All-America honors by crossing the line in seventh at the Champs Sports National Championships.

A volunteer at the Brooke Grove Nursing Home for several years, assisting with elderly patients, Stephens is also a member of the National Honor Society, regularly participating in academic counseling efforts for other students. She also mentors younger athletes in the Olney Cross Country Club, where Stephens got her start in the sport as a youth competitor. "Leah Stephens enjoyed a big step forward in her development by delivering a pair of outstanding performances at elite invitational meets during the first half of the regular season, before becoming an All-American for the first time with a seventh-place finish at the Champs Sports National Championships," said Erik Boal, an editor for DyeStat.com. "She achieved the best finish by a Maryland prep girls competitor at that event since 2016."

Stephens has maintained a 4.26 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on scholarship at Florida 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.

Stephens joins recent Gatorade Maryland Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Juliette Whittaker (2021-22, 2020-21, & 2019-20, Mount de Sales Academy), and Oakley Olson (2018-19, Huntingtown High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Being a Gatorade Player of the Year means paying it forward for the next generation. Through Gatorade's Play it Forward initiative, every Player of the Year receives a grant to give to one of Gatorade's social impact partners, supporting Gatorade's ambition to fuel the future of sport. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 organizations.

For nearly 40 years, Gatorade has honored high school athletes at the top of their game as teammates, supporting their communities and achieving academic success. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes and community leaders, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport.

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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