

**WEST OTTAWA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MICHIGAN GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 23, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Helen Sachs** of **West Ottawa High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Michigan Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Sachs is the second Gatorade Michigan Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from West Ottawa 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 Sachs as Michigan'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, Sachs 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 sophomore raced to the Division 1 Lower Peninsula individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:18.74, leading the Panthers to the state title as a team. She also won the Portage Invitational and Michigan State Spartan Invitational among her nine victories, the most impressive coming at the Nike Midwest Regional, where she clocked a 16:47.90 at the LaVern Gibson course in Indiana. Sachs finished fifth at the Champs Sports Midwest Regional Championships before a foot injury slowed her momentum at Nike Cross Nationals and prevented her from running at the Champs Sports National Championships.

A mentor in West Ottawa High School's L.I.N.K.S. Peer to Peer program, Sachs has provided assistance as a friend and role model for students with special needs, assisting them with socialization, independence and age-appropriate behavior. She has also volunteered locally with Leaders of the 21st Century, a non-profit whose mission is to develop civic-minded youth leaders in urban communities, and she's donated her time on behalf of the Wheatland Music Organization along with participating in the West Ottawa High School Musical Theater program. "Helen Sachs not only learned valuable lessons from teammate and last year's Player of the Year Arianne Olson, but also surpassed many of the outstanding marks Arianne achieved, producing fastest all-divisions performance at the state meet," said Erik Boal, an editor for DyeStat.com. "She followed her state title by clocking the second-fastest 5K time in history by a prep girl at the prestigious LaVern Gibson course in Indiana to win the Nike Midwest Regional title."

Sachs has maintained a 4.00 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior 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.

Sachs joins recent Gatorade Michigan Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Arianne Olson (2021-22, West Ottawa High School), Abby VanderKooi (2020-21 & 2018-19, Western Michigan Christian), and Zofia Dudek (2019-20, Pioneer 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 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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