

**BLACKSBURG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE VIRGINIA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 30, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Conner Rutherford** of **Blacksburg High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Rutherford is the first Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Blacksburg 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 Rutherford as Virginia'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, Rutherford joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners, including Parker Wolfe (2020-21, Cherry Creek High School, Greenwood Village, Colo.), Nico Young (2019-20, Newbury Park High School, Newbury Park, Calif.), 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 6-foot, 152-pound senior raced to victory at the Class 4 state championships this past season with a time of 15:46.0, pacing the Bruins to the team title. Rutherford won five races this season—including three invitationals—and delivered his signature performance in winning the Nike Cross Southeast Regionals and qualifying for nationals. Also the state's top performer at the adidas XC Challenge last fall, where he finished seventh, he clocked a personal-best 14:59.0 to take fifth at the Milesplit.com XC Challenge.

Rutherford has volunteered locally on behalf of YuGo Ministries New Home Construction service-mission trips. "An All-State performer last season, Blacksburg's Conner Rutherford exhibited dramatic year-over-year improvement with his Class 4A state win and his triumph at the Nike Cross Regionals Southeast Championship," said PrepCalTrack editor Rich Gonzalez. "He also led the Bruins to a state team title, extending their tradition of regional excellence."

Rutherford has maintained a 4.11 GPA in the classroom. He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Rutherford joins recent Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Owen McArdle (2021-22, Yorktown High School), Bryce Lentz (2020-21, Colgan High School), and Daniel O'Brien (2019-20 & 2018-19, Virginia Episcopal 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.