

**LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSOURI GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 22, 2024) — In its 39th year of honoring the nation’s most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Natalie Barnard** of **Lafayette High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Barnard is the second Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Lafayette High School.

The award, which celebrates the nation’s top high school athletes for excellence on the field, in the classroom and in the community, distinguishes Barnard as Missouri’s best high school girls cross country player. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport, touting an all-star group of alumni that includes Irene Riggs (2022-23, 2021-22 & 2020-21, Morgantown High School, Morgantown, W. Va.), Katelyn Tuohy (2019-20, 2018-19 & 2017-18, North Rockland High School, Thiels, N.Y.) and Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.).

The 5-foot-6 senior broke the tape at the MSHSAA Class 5 XC Championships this past season, clocking a new Gans Creek course record time of 17:12.70 to finish more than a minute ahead of the rest of the field. The state’s top prep girl at both the Nike XC Town Invitational and the Nike Cross Midwest Regional, Barnard finished 16th overall in the latter event. She posted a 6-2 meet record in 2023, did not lose to an in-state runner and won the MSHSAA Class 5 District 1 title with a personal-best time of 16:53.30.

Barnard serves as Co-Leader of her school’s Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter and has donated her time to community service initiatives in association with the Key Club as well as the National Honor Society. She has also volunteered locally on behalf of the Special Olympics, the Autumn View Gardens retirement facility, the Babler Elementary Bingo Night and the LHS Winter Carnival. “Natalie Barnard’s dominant performance at the state meet coupled with strong showings at a number of invitational meets was more than enough to put her at the top of the list of the state’s best prep girls in 2023,” said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack.

Barnard has maintained a 4.38 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a national letter of intent to run on scholarship at the University of Missouri 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.

Barnard joins recent Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Grace Tyson (2022-23, Lafayette High School), Julia Ray (2021-22, Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day School), Ally Kruger (2020-21, Liberty High School) and Carolyn Ford (2019-20, Rock Bridge High School), among the state’s list of former award winners.

As part of Gatorade’s commitment to breaking down barriers in sport, every Player of the Year also receives a grant to donate to a social impact partner. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners’ grants have totaled more than \$4.9 million across more than 1,600 organizations.

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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