

**LIBERTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ARIZONA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 26, 2024) — In its 39<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Ryan Denhof** of **Liberty High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Arizona Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Denhof is the first Gatorade Arizona Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Liberty 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 Denhof as Arizona's best high school boys 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 Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11 & 2009-10, Carl Sandburg High School, Ill.) and Edward Cheserek (2012-13, St. Benedict's Preparatory School, N.J.).

The 5-foot-8, 135-pound senior won the Division 1 State Championships in an all-class best time of 15:46.3 this past season, leading the Lions to a third-place finish as a team. Denhof also was the first Arizona runner to cross the line at the Nike Cross Southwest Regionals, finishing 19<sup>th</sup> to earn Third Team All-Region honors. He also crossed state lines to capture the gold medal in the Division 1 race at the competitive Mt. Carmel Invitational in California.

A member of his parish's Church Youth Committee, Denhof has volunteered locally on behalf of "Feed My Starving Children," which prepares and packs meals for the malnourished around the world. He has also donated his time helping to organize and conduct cross country races for elementary school students within the Peoria Unified School District. "Over the past 12 months, Ryan Denhof boosted his stock considerably in going from a solid local runner to a state champion and among the best performers from the talent-stacked southwest region of the United States," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "His willingness to cross state lines to seek tougher challenges awakened a brand new level of excellence."

Denhof has maintained a 3.64 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.

Denhof joins recent Gatorade Arizona Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Brandon Martz (2022-23, Catalina Foothills High School), Terrence Keyes (2021-22, Gilbert High School), Dayton Carlson (2020-21, Casteel High School) and Leo Daschbach (2019-20, Highland 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](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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