

**THOMAS NELSON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE KENTUCKY 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 **Riku Sugie** of **Thomas Nelson High School** is the **2023-24 Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Player of the Year**. Sugie is the first Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Player of the Year to be chosen from Thomas Nelson 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 Sugie as Kentucky'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-10, 132-pound junior raced to second place at the Foot Locker South Regional championships with a time of 14:54.81 to advance to nationals, where he placed 18th. Sugie broke the tape at the Class 2A State Championships with a time of 15:40.02, leading the Generals to a fourth-place finish as a team. He was unbeaten by a Kentucky runner last fall.

A member of his school's Student Organization Council, Sugie has volunteered locally with Angel Tree, which serves special-needs adults within the community. He has also donated his time to Naturally Bardstown, a local nonprofit entrusted to maintain or revive nature trails at community parks and elementary schools. "Riku Sugie put together a junior season to remember, winning six races and setting four course records en route to capturing an individual state title and leading Thomas Nelson High School to a program-best fourth-place finish at the state meet."

Sugie has maintained a 4.19 weighted GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior 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.

Sugie joins recent Gatorade Kentucky Boys Cross Country Players of the Year Will Sheets (2022-23, Covington Catholic High School), Caden Miracle (2021-22, Bell County High School), Jackson Watts (2020-21, Madisonville-North Hopkins High School) and Conner O'Shea (2019-20, Madison Central 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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