

**UNION CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW JERSEY GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 16, 2025) — In its 40th year of honoring the nation’s most elite high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Paige Sheppard of Union Catholic High School** is the **2024-25 Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Sheppard is the first Gatorade New Jersey **Girls Cross Country** Player of the Year to be chosen from Union Catholic High School.

Gatorade Player of the Year is the top honor in high school sports, celebrating the nation’s best high school athletes for their success on the field, in the classroom and in the community. The award distinguishes Sheppard as New Jersey’s best high school girls cross country athlete, and she joins an impressive group of alumni that spans CEOs, coaches and star athletes such as Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, Ca.), Katelyn Tuohy (2017-18, 2018-19 & 2019-20, North Rockland High School, N.Y.) and Addison Ritzenhein (2023-24, Niwot High School, Co.).

The 5-foot-5 sophomore broke the tape at the NJSIAA Non-Public Class A Championships this past season in a time of 17:57.0, leading the Vikings to the team championship. Sheppard won the Nike Cross Northeast Regional for the second year in a row, breaking the tape in 18:05.9. The state’s returning Gatorade Player of the Year and the winner in eight of her nine races last fall, she capped her campaign with a top-30 finish at the Nike Cross Nationals Final in Oregon.

An accomplished artist whose work has been selected for display at various art shows, Sheppard has volunteered locally with the Student Movement Against Cancer at her school, which prepares holiday cards for cancer patients. She was also a recent recipient of the Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Award, which honors high-achieving African American students in a variety of disciplines. “Paige Sheppard proved once again to be the most prolific runner in the Garden State—even more dominant than last year,” said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. “The precocious sophomore keyed her team’s near-unbeaten season, culminating with Union Catholic’s 10th-place finish at nationals.”

Sheppard has maintained a weighted 4.16 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 across 12 different high school sports - 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.

Two-time winner Sheppard joins recent Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Emma Zawatksi (2022-23, Freehold Township High School), Angelina Perez (2021-22, Lakeland Regional High School) and Charlotte Bednar (2020-21, The Lawrenceville 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, the Gatorade Player of the Year program has provided more than \$5.6 million in grants to winners across more than 2,000 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 Instagram at [instagram.com/Gatorade](https://www.instagram.com/Gatorade), Facebook at [facebook.com/GatoradePOY](https://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) and X(Twitter) at x.com/Gatorade.

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