

CHARLOTTESVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE VIRGINIA 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 **Elaina Pierce** of **Charlottesville High School** is the **2024-25 Gatorade Virginia Girls Cross Country Player of the Year**. Pierce is the first Gatorade Virginia **Girls Cross Country** Player of the Year to be chosen from Charlottesville 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 Pierce as Virginia'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-11 junior won the VHSL Class 4 state meet this past season with a time of 18:07.0, breaking the tape 25 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor. Pierce also earned First Team All-Region honors by taking fifth at the Nike Cross Southeast Regional Championships. She was unbeaten against in-state runners in 2024 and won 9 of her 12 races.

An accomplished cello player who performs in the school orchestra, Pierce has volunteered locally with the PB&J Fund's holiday backpack food packing program, ensuring community members have enough food during the two-week winter break from school. She has also donated her time as a member of both Link Crew and Student Council Association in addition to helping to staff stations at the annual field day at elementary schools. "Elaina Pierce simply dazzled from start to finish this past cross country season, bagging three course records en route to earning her first state distance title," said Rich Gonzalez of PrepCalTrack. "Unbeaten against in-state competition, she turned in an All-Region performance in November and then a Top 50 finish at nationals last month."

Pierce has maintained a weighted 4.41 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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 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.

Pierce joins recent Gatorade Virginia Girls Cross Country Players of the Year Allie Zealand (2023-24 & 2022-23, Pacers Homeschool High School), Maddie Gardiner (2021-22, The Covenant School) and Carly Wilkes (2020-21, Glenvar 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, 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.