

**Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729- 3685)**

**SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 29, 2018) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Olivia Sovereign of Saint Thomas Aquinas High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Sovereign is the first Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Saint Thomas Aquinas High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the racecourse, distinguishes Sovereign as Kansas' best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Sovereign joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg, Orland Park, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Prep., San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-6 junior won the Cross Country Coaches National Youth Championships in the girls' 15-18 division this past season, breaking the tape in 17:50.49. Racing to 12th at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships in 17:44.61, Sovereign also won the KSHSAA 5A State Championships with a time of 18:36.50, leading the Saints to third place as a team.

A winner of the President's Volunteer Service Award at her school for completing more than 100 hours of community service in a calendar year, Sovereign has donated her time to the local Catholic Charities thrift store as well as Ronald McDonald House charities. A member of her school's French club, she has also worked as a lifeguard at the Lenexa Rec Center in addition to serving as a youth soccer referee and track coach. "Not only did Olivia repeat as state champion and capture a third consecutive age-group title at the Cross Country Coaches National Youth Championships, but she showcased significant improvement against a tough field at the NXN Heartland Regional," said Erik Boal, editor of DyeStat.com. "She joins an impressive group of Kansas Gatorade honorees that includes Cailie Logue, Emily Venters and Alli Cash, all of whom have had a big impact on their teams at the NCAA Division 1 level."

Sovereign has maintained an A average 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 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 work with top sport-specific experts and a media advisory board of accomplished, veteran prep sports journalists to determine the state winners in each sport.

Sovereign joins Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Molly Born (2016-17, Shawnee Mission Northwest High School), Cailie Logue (2015-16 & 2014-15, Girard High School), Emily Venters (2013-14, Free State High School), Alli Cash (2012-13 & 2011-12, Shawnee Mission West High School), Molly Milbourn (2010-11, El Dorado High School), Avery Clifton (2009-10, Washburn Rural High School), Avery Clifton (2008-09, Washburn Rural High School), and Laura Roxberg (2007-08, Blue Valley Northwest High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Sovereign will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. For more on the Gatorade Player of the Year program, including nomination information, a complete list of past winners and the announcement of the Gatorade National Player of the Year, visit <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.

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