

Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729- 3685)

**MILTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE GEORGIA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 12, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Sam Bowers of Milton High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Bowers is the first Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Milton 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 field, distinguishes Bowers as Georgia's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Bowers 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.), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-8, 125-pound senior broke the tape at the GHSA Class 7A State Championships for the second straight year this past season with a time of 15:58.29, leading the Eagles to the state class title as a team. A two-time Atlanta Track Club All-Metro Cross Country Runner of the Year, Bowers also took fifth at the NXN Southeast Regional championships in 15:09.00, advancing to the NXN Final, where he crossed the line 35th in the nation and as the fastest Georgia runner at the event, clocking a time of 15:48.20.

A member of the Honor Council and an attendee of the faith-based Falling Creek Camp for boys in North Carolina for the past seven summers, Bowers has donated his time as a youth mentor and coach for the Alpha Crush Running Club. "Sam's season from August to December was second to none in the Peach State," said Marist School head coach Eric Heintz. "He is one of the fiercest competitors and most aggressive runners to have come through Georgia. Ultimately, his state championship, his regional performance, and top finish at nationals set him above the best of the rest in the state in 2017."

Bowers has maintained a 93.7 average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Georgia 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.

Bowers joins Gatorade Georgia Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Jacob McLeod (2016-17, Trinity Christian School), Frank Pittman (2015-16, Marist School), Reilly Friedman (2014-15, The Galloway School), Austin Sprague (2013-14, St. Pius X Catholic High School), Josh Brickell (2012-13 & 2011-12, Peachtree Ridge High School), Cody Barger (2010-11, North Hall High School), Kirubel Erassa (2009-10, Grayson), Taylor Lord (2008-09, Chapel Hill), and Zack Flickinger (2007-08, Lassiter) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Bowers 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/>.

###