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**PAPILLION-LA VISTA SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEBRASKA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 12, 2018) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Jake Ralston of Papillion-La Vista South High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ralston is the first Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Papillion-La Vista South 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 Ralston as Nebraska'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, Ralston 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-6, 120-pound senior won the Class A state meet this past season with a time of 15:55.5, breaking the tape 20.5 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Titans to the state title as a team. Ralston took ninth at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships and won the postseason Nebraska Cross Country Festival. A three-time Super State selection, he was unbeaten against in-state competition at 5K in 2017.

Ralston has volunteered locally on behalf of military veterans and as a youth running coach. "Jake is a very well-trained runner who goes about his racing with a level head which shows in his performances," said Ryan Salem, head coach of Lincoln Southwest High. "He utilizes his dedication to training to adapt to nearly any racing style and make adjustments mid-race to be successful."

Ralston has maintained a weighted 4.24 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Kansas 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.

Ralston joins Gatorade Nebraska Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Seth Hirsch (2016-17 & 2015-16, Millard West High School), John Nownes (2014-15, Creighton Preparatory School), Wyatt McGuire (2013-14, North Platte High School), Joe Harter (2012-13, Millard West High School), Jacob Olson (2011-12 & 2010-11, Kearney High School), Jarren Heng (2009-10 & 2008-09, Norfolk Catholic High School), and Jon Ronhovde (2007-08, Fremont High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Ralston 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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