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**KIRTLAND CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO 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 Kashon Harrison of Kirtland Central High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Harrison is the first Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Kirtland Central 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 Harrison as New Mexico'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, Harrison 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, 115-pound junior raced to the Class 5A state meet individual title this past season with a time of 15:54.85, breaking the tape 35.75 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Broncos to a second-place finish as a team. Harrison also won the Foot Locker West Regional championships, then earned All-American status by placing 14th at Foot Locker nationals. A three-time First Team All-State selection, he was unbeaten against in-state competition in 2017.

Harrison has volunteered locally as a youth running coach. "Kashon's mental focus and strength is what separates him from his peers," said Lenny Esson, head coach of Kirtland Central High. "He's not cocky, but he's confident. He feels that he can go out and win every race he runs."

Harrison has maintained a B average in the classroom. He has made a verbal commitment to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Oregon beginning in the fall of 2019.

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.

Harrison joins Gatorade New Mexico Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Jordan Lesansee (2016-17, Albuquerque Academy), Andrew Bosquez (2015-16, Hobbs High School), Niles Thomas (2014-15, Miyamura High School), Colin Hemez (2013-14, Los Alamos High School), Luis Martinez (2012-13 & 2011-12, Sue Cleveland High School), Neil Longenbaugh (2010-11, Albuquerque Academy), Kyle Pittman (2009-10, Los Alamos High School), Bryce Palmer (2008-09, Eldorado High School), and Ben Johnson (2007-08, Albuquerque Academy) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Harrison 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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