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**FREE STATE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED  
GATORADE KANSAS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 8, 2014) — In its 29<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Emily Venters of Free State High School as its 2013-14 Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Venters is the first Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Free State 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 Venters as Kansas's 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, Venters joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-00, 2000-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-5 freshman distance runner won the Class 6A individual state championship with a time of 14:58.32 this past season, leading the Firebirds to the state title as a team. The All-Area Runner of the Year as named by the Lawrence Journal-World, Venters captured 14th place at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships in 18:18.40. In her first cross-country season, she also won Sunflower League and Class 6A regional championships.

Also an accomplished swimmer, Venters has maintained a 3.86 GPA in the classroom. A member of her school's student council and choir, she has volunteered locally on behalf of a soup kitchen, Young Life, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer and the Meals on Wheels Association of America.

"If I would characterize Emily in one word it would be 'toughness,'" said Tony Bozarth, head coach of rival Olathe East High. "I felt that was what she brought to the course, both mentally and physically. This was reflected in her leadership and in her running. Our girls admired Emily and liked her, but also knew that racing her was going to mean stepping up."

Venters will begin her sophomore 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 high school sports leadership team in partnership with [USA TODAY High School Sports](#), 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.

Venters joins Gatorade Kansas Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Alli Cash (2012-13 & 2011-12, Shawnee Mission West High School), Molly Milbourn (2010-11, El Dorado High School), Avery Clifton (2009-10 & 2008-09, Washburn Rural), and Laura Roxberg (2007-08, Blue Valley Northwest) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. 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 [www.gatorade.com/poy](http://www.gatorade.com/poy).

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