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Contact: Matt Schiffman (312-729-3672)

**LA CUEVA HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 8, 2015) — In its 30th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Natasha Bernal of La Cueva High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade New Mexico Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Bernal is the first Gatorade New Mexico Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from La Cueva 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 Bernal as New Mexico'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, Bernal 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-4 senior raced to the Class 6A individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:50.85, leading the Bears to the state title as a team. Bernal also won the Metro Championships, the Albuquerque Academy Invitational, the Cleveland Invitational, the Rio Rancho Jamboree, the La Cueva Invitational and the Lobo Invitational in 2014. She finished 12th at the Nike Cross Nationals Southwest Regional championships in 17:46.

Bernal has maintained a 3.46 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally on behalf of the La Cueva PTA Community Block Party for elementary and middle school students.

"Natasha's success is notable because it's her first season as a cross country runner," said La Cueva coach Nicholas Martinez. "She has a wonderful work ethic and a humble attitude. She's become the greatest cross country athlete that I've ever coached."

Bernal has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at the University of New Mexico 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.

Bernal joins Gatorade New Mexico Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Kelli Reagan (2013-14, St. Pius X High School), Malia Gonzales (2012-13, Sue Cleveland High School), Jenna Thurman (2011-12, Del Norte High School), Julia Foster (2010-11 & 2009-10, Albuquerque Academy), Clara Milne (2008-09, Albuquerque Academy), and Rachel Velarde (2007-08, Eldorado) 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.

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