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**OPELIKA HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 15, 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 Ben Bryant of Opelika High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Bryant is the first Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Opelika 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 Bryant as Alabama'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, Bryant 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.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-11, 138-pound senior raced to the Class 6A individual state championship with a time of 15:34.76 this past season, leading the Bulldogs to second place as a team. A two-time Class 6A All-State honoree, Bryant finished 46th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 15:42. He took second at the Class 6A state meet as a junior in 2013.

Bryant has maintained a 4.06 weighted GPA in the classroom. A member of the National Honor Society as well as the Latin and Science national honor societies, he also sings in the First Baptist Church's chancel choir. He has volunteered locally on behalf of his church, a homeless shelter and a food reserve for the needy as well as the Reading is Fundamental program.

"Ben Bryant is the epitome of what a student-athlete should embody," said Opelika head coach Kristin Blatt. "Ben's hard work and dedication to the sport and academics has been a true inspiration to everyone who has the privilege of knowing this young man."

Bryant has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at Samford University beginning 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.

Bryant joins Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Mac Macoy (2013-14, Vestavia Hills High School), Payton Ballard (2012-13, Mountain Brook High School), Griffin Lee (2011-12, John Carroll Catholic High School), Brandon Hazouri (2010-11, Spain Park High School), Nathan Lewis (2009-10, Cold Springs), and Patrick McGregor (2008-09 & 2007-08, Hoover) 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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