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FESTUS HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE MISSOURI 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 Michael Karls of Festus High School as its 2014-15 Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Karls is the first Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Festus 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 Karls as Missouri'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, Karls 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 senior raced to the Class 3 individual state championships with a time of 15:23.80 this past season, leading the Tigers to the state title as a team. A two-time First Team All-Metro selection as named by the St. Louis Track Club, Karls took 14th at the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships in 15:25.50. He also clocked a 15:04.80 at the Chile Pepper Festival, which ranked as the state's fastest 5K of the season.

Karls has maintained a 4.30 weighted GPA in the classroom and ranks No. 1 in his graduating class. A member of the National Honor Society and his school's student council as well as its assembly and prom committees, he has volunteered locally as a youth running instructor, at a food pantry, as part of charity initiatives to benefit needy children and on behalf of community cleanup efforts.

"His work ethic is top-of-the-line, and all of his miles of training have obviously paid off for him," said Cory Dicus, head coach of rival North County High. "When you watch him race, you can see his commitment to himself and his teammates to dig deep and find a way to succeed. His drive is clear and unquestionable, and he capitalizes on his potential through hard work. He is an excellent representation of Missouri cross country."

Karls will attend the United States Naval Academy this fall, where he will continue his running career.

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.

Karls joins Gatorade Missouri Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Noah Kauppila (2013-14, Marquette High School), Simon Belete (2012-13, Blue Springs High School), Zach Herriott (2011-12 & 2010-11, Rockhurst High School), Maksim Korolev (2009-10, Harrisonville), Kevin Colon (2008-09, Lee's Summit West), and Eric Fernandez (2007-08, Parkway West) 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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