

Contact: Kelly Magnus (312-729-3622)

**LA CUEVA HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NEW MEXICO GIRLS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 17, 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 Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Bernal is the second Gatorade New Mexico Girls Track & Field Athlete 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 track, distinguishes Bernal as New Mexico's best high school girls track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Bernal joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Allyson Felix (2001-02, Los Angeles Baptist, 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.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.), Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.) and Bianca Knight (2006-07, Ridgeland HS, Miss.).

The 5-foot-4 senior distance runner won three individual state championships this spring and led the Bears to a second-place finish as a team at the Class 6A state meet. Bernal captured the 800-meter run with a time of 2:14.42, the 1600-meter run in 5:16.87 and 3200-meter run in 11:10. Also the state's 2014-15 Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, she won the mile at the prestigious Great Southwest Classic with a time of 5:06.88, nearly eight seconds faster than her next-closest competitor.

Bernal has maintained a 3.81 weighted 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 Bernal's ability to sweep three distance events in the same day at the state meet was extraordinary," said David Nunez, head coach at Onate High. "When you figure in the competition she had to compete against, it became even more impressive. It was a tall order to not only complete the sweep but also run some great times."

Bernal has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in track and field on an athletic 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 recent Gatorade New Mexico Girls Track & Field Athletes of the Year Lauren Martinez (2013-14, Eldorado High School), Jenna Thurman (2012-13, Del Norte High School), Gina Okoye (2011-12, Eldorado High School), Julia Foster (2010-11 & 2009-10, Albuquerque Academy), Lesly Torres (2008-09, Los Lunas), Skye Barnett (2007-08, Cibola), and Alexandra Darling (2006-07, La Cueva) among the state's list of former award winners.

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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