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**STAPLES HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 14, 2016) — In its 31st year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced Hannah DeBalsi of Staples High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. DeBalsi is the first Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Staples 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 DeBalsi as Connecticut'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, DeBalsi 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-3 senior won her third consecutive New England Championship this past season with a time of 18:20.9. The state's two-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, DeBalsi also won the State Open championship with a time of 18:08 and the Class LL state title in 18:14. She finished 12th nationally at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

DeBalsi has maintained a 4.16 GPA in the classroom. She has served as a math and science tutor and has volunteered locally on behalf of the Pequot Library and area road races.

"Hannah possesses a rare maturity, and has even since she was a freshman," said Staples High head coach Amanda Parrish. "Her healthy, balanced attitude about training and racing has been inspirational."

DeBalsi has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at Stanford 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.

Three-time winner DeBalsi joins Gatorade Connecticut Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Brianna Lenehan (2012-13, Norwich Free Academy), Reid Watson (2011-12, Glastonbury High School), Jackie Nicholas (2010-11, Nonnewaug High School), Lauren Sara (2009-10, Frank Scott Bunnell High School), Moira Kenny (2008-09, Immaculate High School), and Heather Stephens (2007-08, Ridgefield High School) 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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