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**NAPERVILLE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE ILLINOIS 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 Judy Pendergast of Naperville North High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Pendergast is the first Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Naperville North 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 Pendergast as Illinois'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, Pendergast 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-5 senior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a meet-record time of 15:53.8, leading the Huskies to second place as a team. Pendergast finished fourth nationally at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships in 17:20 and took eighth at the Nike Cross Nationals Final. She also won the NXN Midwest Regional championships with a course-record time of 17:00.6 and was runner-up at the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships.

Pendergast has maintained a 4.13 GPA in the classroom. A member of her school's student government, she has volunteered locally as a member of the faith-based Young Life ministry and the National Honor Society.

"Judy is the fastest high school girl in state cross country history, and she's also a tremendous kid," said Naperville North coach Dan Iverson. "When she broke the all-time record at state, her first reaction was to be sad with her teammates because we didn't win as a team."

Pendergast will attend Harvard University this fall, where she will compete in cross country and track and field.

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.

Pendergast joins Gatorade Illinois Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Maryjeanne Gilbert (2014-15, Peoria Notre Dame High School), Anna Sophia Keller (2013-14, St. Anthony High School), Courtney Ackerman (2012-13, New Trier High School), Amanda Fox (2011-12, Naperville Central High School), Kayla Beattie (2010-11, Woodstock High School), Lavinia Jurkiewicz (2009-10, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School), Lindsay Flanagan (2008-09, Lake Park High School), and Kristin Sutherland (2007-08, Carl Sandburg 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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