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**PLEASANT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE IOWA 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 McKenzie Yanek of Pleasant Valley High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Yanek is the first Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Pleasant Valley 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 Yanek as Iowa'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, Yanek 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 senior won the Class 4A state meet this past season with a record time of 17:55.0, breaking the tape 26.7 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Spartans to a second-place finish as a team. Yanek placed 18th at both the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships and the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships. Also the 2013 4A state meet champion, she missed the 2014 state meet with an illness.

Yanek has maintained a weighted 4.13 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally with Toys for Tots and on behalf of the Quad Cities Marathon. She has also donated her time as a youth track coach.

"McKenzie Yanek is an incredibly hard worker and a true teammate in every sense of the word," said Erin Flynn, head coach of Bettendorf High. "What makes McKenzie such a good runner is her openness to coaching, her persistence and dedication to her sport, and the passion to always be the best she can be."

Yanek has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at the University of Alabama 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.

Yanek joins Gatorade Iowa Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Jordyn Kleve (2014-15, Johnston High School), Rebekah Topham (2013-14 & 2011-12, Griswold High School), Anna Holdiman (2012-13, Waverly-Shell Rock High School), Shelby Houlihan (2010-11, East High School), Katie Flood (2009-10 & 2007-08, Dowling Catholic High School), and Ashlie Decker (2008-09, Dowling Catholic 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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