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**LEESVILLE ROAD HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA 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 Nevada Mareno of Leesville Road High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Mareno is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Leesville Road 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 Mareno as North Carolina'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, Mareno 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-7 junior distance runner finished third at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships with a time of 17:17.60 this past season. Mareno also placed second at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 17:05. The Class 4A individual state champion, breaking the tape in 17:46.50, she led the Pride to third place as a team. Mareno was unbeaten against North Carolina competition in 2015 and her winning time of 16:36.18 at the CAP 8 Conference Championship ranked as the state's fastest 5K among prep competitors this past fall.

Mareno has maintained a 5.00 weighted GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a youth track and field instructor, she has volunteered on behalf of the Special Olympics.

"She was never satisfied with anything but her best effort, no matter how large the margin of victory," said Leesville Road head coach Karen Hawkins. "She also began to see that her performances were an opportunity to show who she is and to inspire those around her to reach higher and see what is possible. Far beyond her innate talent, her season is a shining example of the opportunities that sustained passion, belief and hard work can make possible."

Mareno will begin her senior year of high school 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.

Mareno joins Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Elly Henes (2014-15, Green Hope High School), Kalya Montgomery (2013-14, Mount Tabor High School), Megan Sullivan (2012-13, Broughton High School), Sammy George (2011-12, Millbrook High School), Darby Middlebrook (2010-11, Watauga High School), Wesley Frazier (2009-10, Ravenscroft School) and Adrienne Soo (2008-09 & 2007-08, Durham Academy) 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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