

Contact: Jason Belenke (312-729-3631)

**BISMARCK HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE NORTH DAKOTA 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 Mattie Shirley-Fairbairn of Bismarck High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Shirley-Fairbairn is the second Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Bismarck 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 Shirley-Fairbairn as North Dakota'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, Shirley-Fairbairn 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-4 freshman distance runner won the Class A individual state championship with a time of 13:47.30 this past season, leading the Demons to the team title. Shirley-Fairbairn took seventh at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships in 17:30. Unbeaten against in-state competition in 2015, her winning times at the Becki Wells Invitational (13:44.84) and the NXN Heartland Regional, respectively, ranked as the fastest 4K and 5K times in North Dakota prep history. She placed second at the 2014 Class A state meet as an eighth-grader.

Shirley-Fairbairn has maintained a 4.00 GPA in the classroom. In addition to donating her time as a youth running instructor, she has volunteered locally at nursing homes and as part of food drives.

"I admire the hard work, talent and character she displays as a young runner," said Carla Wahlund, head coach at rival Minot High. "She is blessed to win her races in North Dakota quite easily and handles the spotlight well. Many of my athletes enjoy watching her run, as she makes it look so easy to them. When a young athlete shines as she does, it isn't easy for them to handle that kind of pressure. She seems to do it well."

Shirley-Fairbairn will begin her sophomore 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.

Shirley-Fairbairn joins Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Karly Ackley (2014-15, Grand Forks Central High School), Jordan Jacob (2013-14, Century High School), Brittany Brown Otter (2012-13, Bismarck High School), Tarin Lachowitz (2011-12, 2010-11 & 2009-10, Davies High School), Alissa Mears (2008-09, West Fargo High School), and Lindsay Anderson (2007-08, Leeds 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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