

Contact: Jason Belenke (312-729-3631)

**ALTER HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE OHIO 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 Abby Nichols of Alter High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Nichols is the first Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Alter 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 Nichols as Ohio'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, Nichols 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-2 senior raced to the Division II individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:05.4, leading the Knights to a state title as a team. The 2015 Greater Catholic League Runner of the Year, Nichols finished 18th at the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships, crossing the line in 18:08.5.

Nichols has maintained a 3.76 GPA in the classroom. A member of her school's varsity football cheerleading squad, she has volunteered locally on behalf of an area homeless shelter and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to benefit the needy.

"Abby Nichols is always a joy to coach and to teach," said Alter High head coach John Davalos. "She is always smiling and laughing with her teammates and ready to enjoy life. But once the gun goes off, she is all business and her goal is that no one beats her to the finish."

Nichols has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at The Ohio State 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.

Nichols joins Gatorade Ohio Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Dominique Clairmonte (2014-15, Lexington High School), Annie Heffernan (2013-14, St. Ursula Academy), Mary Kate Vaughn (2012-13, Oakwood High School), Claudia Saunders (2011-12, Princeton High School), Michelle Thomas (2010-11, Glen Este High School), Madeline Chambers (2009-10, Magnificat High School), Stephanie Morgan (2008-09, Barnesville High School), and Claire Durkin (2007-08, Worthington Kilbourne 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.

###