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**BRIEN MCMAHON HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 22, 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 Eric van der Els of Brien McMahon High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Connecticut Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Van der Els is the first Gatorade Connecticut Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Brien McMahon 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 van der Els as Connecticut's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, van der Els 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.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-7, 120-pound senior raced to the State Open individual championship this past season with a time of 15:47. Van der Els also won the Class LL state championship in 15:52 and finished third at the New England Cross Country Championships. He crossed the line fifth at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships and placed 18th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

Van der Els has maintained a 3.12 GPA in the classroom. He has served as a summer camp counselor and has volunteered on behalf of the Pura Vida club, which helps feed disadvantaged children internationally.

"Eric has made coaching very easy," said Brien McMahon coach Patrick Bradley. "He respects and follows his coaches' game plan, and as a captain, he's a natural leader both in voice and in work ethic."

Van der Els has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at the University of Connecticut 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.

van der Els joins Gatorade Connecticut Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Alex Ostberg (2014-15 & 2013-14, Darien High School), Henry Wynne (2012-13, Staples High School), Connor Rog (2011-12 & 2010-11, Fairfield College Preparatory School), John Raneri (2009-10 & 2008-09, New Fairfield High School), and Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury 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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