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**MERRITT ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE FLORIDA 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 Steven Cross of Merritt Island High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Cross is the first Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Merritt Island 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 Cross as Florida'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, Cross 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-10, 140-pound senior raced to the Class 3A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:30.63. Cross also broke the tape first at the Region 4 championships, the FSU Pre-State Invitational, the UF Mt. Dew Invitational and the Astronaut Invitational. He finished 31st at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships.

Cross has maintained a 3.65 GPA in the classroom. A math tutor in his school, he has volunteered locally on behalf of a food pantry and Habitat for Humanity.

"Steven is absolutely self-motivated to become a top runner in the U.S.," said Merritt Island coach Bill Buonanni. "He loves running and everything about the sport, and he has an infectious attitude which led to us having the largest boys team we've had at our school."

Cross has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at Florida 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.

Cross joins Gatorade Florida Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Sukhi Khosla (2014-15, Leon High School), Nick Diaz (2013-14, Miami Sunset Senior High School), Thomas Howell (2012-13, Niceville High School), Andres Arroyo (2011-12, Colonial High School), Jimmy Clark (2010-11, Creekside High School), Matt Mizereck (2009-10, Leon High School), Brian Atkinson (2008-09, Melbourne High School), and Brian Atkinson (2007-08, Melbourne 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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