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**LA FOLLETTE HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE WISCONSIN 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 Finn Gessner of La Follette High School as its 2015-16 Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Gessner is the second Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from La Follette 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 Gessner as Wisconsin'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, Gessner 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-11, 135-pound junior raced to the Division 1 individual championship this past season with a time of 15:44.6, leading the Lancers to a second-place finish as a team. The 2015 Wisconsin State Journal Area Runner of the Year, Gessner took fourth at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships, crossing the line in 15:14.2. He went on to compete at the Nike Cross Nationals Final, where he finished eighth in 15:18.2. He also cruised to an eighth-place finish at the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships with a time of 15:17.1, qualifying for the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships and crossing the line in 11th-place with a time of 15:29. One of only six runners in the country to compete in both national title races, he earned All-American honors in each.

Gessner has maintained a 3.49 GPA in the classroom. He has volunteered locally on behalf of his church youth group and as a track & field coach.

"Finn Gessner can really run and he makes it look easy," said Brad Seely, head coach at D.C. Everest High. "He shows a lot of maturity for a junior. It will be exciting to see what he can do in the future. I just wish he was on my team instead."

Gessner will begin his 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.

Gessner joins Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Olin Hacker (2014-15 & 2013-14, Madison West High School), Ryan Kromer (2012-13, Hudson High School), Chandler Diffie (2011-12, LaFollette High School), Dan Schubert (2010-11, Appleton East High School), Marcus Paulson (2009-10, Hamilton Hamilton High School), Brett Kelly (2008-09, West High School), and Elliot Krause (2007-08, Appleton North 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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