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**BRIEN MCMAHON HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED
GATORADE CONNECTICUT BOYS TRACK & FIELD ATHLETE OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 24, 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 Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Van der Els is the first Gatorade Connecticut Boys Track & Field Athlete 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 track, distinguishes van der Els as Connecticut's best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, van der Els joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Meb Keflezighi (1993-94, San Diego HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.) and Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt HS, Ia.).

The 5-foot-7, 120-pound senior won the 1600-meter run with a meet-record time of 4:08.42 at the State Open championships this past season. Also the state's Gatorade Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, van der Els also won the 1600 at the Class LL state meet this spring as well as the New England Championships. His season-best time of 8:50.53 in the 3200-meter run ranked as the nation's No. 7 clocking among prep competitors in 2016 at the time of his selection. He also earned a national championship in the 5000-meter run at the New Balance Nationals Indoor this past winter.

Van der Els has maintained a 3.11 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 sets his goals and sticks to them, and his competitive spirit is always in him, even when people aren't watching," said Brien McMahon coach Patrick Bradley. "Timing him and watching him do workouts is sometimes more exciting than the race itself. He has been a great leader for our team and never lost sight that this is a team sport."

Van der Els has signed a National Letter of Intent to run on an athletic scholarship at the University of Connecticut 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 recent Gatorade Connecticut Boys Track & Field Athletes of the Year Spencer Brown (2014-15, Wilton High School), Tyler Latham (2013-14, Fitch High School), Henry Wynne (2012-13, Staples High School), Jake Scinto (2011-12, Cheshire High School), John Wlasuk (2010-11, Newtown High School), Chris FitzSimons (2009-10, Hamden High School), Cas Loxsom (2008-09, Wilbur Cross High School), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School), and Terrell Wilks (2006-07, Hillhouse High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

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.