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**GAYVILLE-VOLIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE SOUTH DAKOTA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 23, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Laura Nelson of Gayville-Volin High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Nelson is the first Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Gayville-Volin 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 Nelson as South Dakota'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/February, Nelson joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg, Orland Park, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Prep., San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-4 senior won the Class B state meet this past season with a time of 18:38.88, breaking the tape 1:20.96 ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Raiders to a second-place finish as a team. Nelson won a state title as a freshman in 2013 and finished as runner-up in each of the next two years. She placed 19th at Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships and 26th at the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championships this past fall.

An award-winning clarinet and piano player, Nelson has volunteered locally as a mentor through Students Against Destructive Decisions. She has also donated her time on behalf of multiple community-service initiatives through her church. "Laura Nelson dominated the cross country scene throughout the year," said Bill Hansen, head coach of Viborg-Hurley High. "She dominated Class B. There wasn't anyone within 100 meters of her after the first 2,000 meters of the race."

Nelson has maintained a weighted 4.21 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of South Dakota 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 Player of the Year Selection Committee, 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.

Nelson joins Gatorade South Dakota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Ella Byers (2015-16, Chamberlain High School), Emily Hawkes (2014-15, Madison High School), Tamara Gorman (2013-14, 2012-13 & 2010-11, Stevens High School), Alex Hess (2011-12, Roosevelt High School), Madeleine Takahashi (2009-10, Sturgis Brown High School), Seanna Kautz (2008-09, Roosevelt High School), and Mariah Hofer (2007-08, Yankton High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Nelson will be able to select a national or local youth sports organization to receive a grant as part of the Gatorade Play It Forward program. Every Gatorade Player of the Year state winner receives a \$1,000 grant to donate and will have the opportunity to enter for an additional \$10,000 spotlight grant by writing a brief essay explaining why their selected organization deserves additional support. 12 spotlight grants - one for each sport - will be announced throughout the year.

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](http://www.gatorade.com/poy).

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