

**Contact: John Manzo (312-729-3656)**

**BINGHAM HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE UTAH 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 Whitney Rich of Bingham High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Utah Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rich is the first Gatorade Utah Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Bingham 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 Rich as Utah'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, Rich 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 raced to the Class 5A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:39.3. Rich placed 6th at the Nike Cross Nationals Southwest Regional championships and earned All-American honors with an 11th-place finish nationally at the NXN Final. She also broke the tape at the Murray Invitational, the Viking Invitational, the Highland Invitational and the Region 3 championships.

Also a talented pianist, Rich has volunteered for humanitarian missions to Africa and Fiji. "Whitney is the most dedicated athlete that I've ever coached," said Bingham coach Alisha Paxton. "She's more physically and mentally prepared than other athletes of her caliber and she's willing to learn from both successes and failures."

Rich has maintained a 3.71 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at Brigham Young University 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.

Rich joins Gatorade Utah Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Courtney Wayment (2015-16, Davis High School), Lucy Biles (2014-15, 2013-14 & 2012-13, Herriman High School), Kelsey Braithwaite (2011-12, Box Elder High School), Shea Martinez (2010-11, Davis High School), Gillian Gorelik (2009-10, Park City High School), Danielle Menlove (2008-09, Jordan High School), and Hailey Knettles (2007-08, Judge Memorial Catholic High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Rich 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).

###