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**UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 23, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced TaShala Turner of University High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Turner is the second Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from University 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 Turner as West Virginia'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, Turner 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 junior finished seventh at the Nike Cross Nationals Southeast Regional championships this past season with a time of 18:05.2, making her the states' highest-placing finisher in either of the nation's two elite postseason championships. Unbeaten against in-state competition, Turner was forced to drop out of the Group AAA state meet after a mile with an injury. A two-time All-State selection, she won eight of nine races this fall prior to states.

Turner has volunteered locally with the Salvation Army and as a youth running coach. "From her first practice her freshman year, TaShala has shown a commitment and work ethic to be the best," said Ed Frohnapfel, head coach of University High. "She continues to approach every practice and race with the total and complete focus of an elite athlete."

Turner has maintained a 3.78 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her 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 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.

Turner joins Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Jessica Melvin (2015-16, Philip Barbour High School), Peyton Panger (2014-15, Capital High School), Amelia Paladino (2013-14, University High School), Maggie Drazba (2012-13 & 2011-12, St. Marys High School), Sarah McCauley (2010-11, Philip Barbour High School), Alex Dent (2009-10, Hurricane High School), and Letitia Propst (2008-09 & 2007-08, Elkins High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Turner 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.

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