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**STARKVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI 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 Kate Mattox of Starkville High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Mississippi Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Mattox is the first Gatorade Mississippi Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Starkville 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 Mattox as Mississippi'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, Mattox 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 three-time returning Gatorade State Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, the 5-foot-9 senior won the MHSAA Class 6A state meet this past season, breaking the tape in 18:50.80 to finish 47.5 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor, and leading the Yellow Jackets to a fourth-place finish as a team. Mattox clocked the fastest 5K time (18:07.00) by a Mississippi girls prep runner in 2016, won all seven races she entered and concluded her high school career unbeaten by any in-state competitor. She will graduate as the state meet course record-holder with a time of 18:18.40.

The vice president of her school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, Mattox has volunteered locally as a team leader for her First United Methodist youth group and has served as part of multiple community service initiatives on behalf of her church. She has also donated her time to the Middle School Foreign Mission Camp in Starkville. "As a senior, Kate holds records and is the fastest distance runner in our division," said Starkville head coach Caroline Woomer. "Even so, she has challenged herself to work harder, to hurt more and to drop her times below what even she normally expects of herself. This has been an exceptional year for her."

Mattox has maintained a 4.17 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi 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.

Four time-winner Mattox joins Gatorade Mississippi Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Regen McGee (2012-13, Pass Christian High School), Christina Daniels (2011-12, Tupelo High School), Elisabeth Gaillet (2010-11, St. Andrew's Episcopal School), and Cory McGee (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, Pass Christian High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Mattox 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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