

Contact: John Manzo (312-729-3656)

**GRAND FORKS CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH DAKOTA 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 Karly Ackley of Grand Forks Central High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ackley is the first Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Grand Forks Central 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 Ackley as North 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, Ackley 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 6-foot senior raced to the Class A individual state championship this past season with a time of 17:13.2. The state's 2014-15 Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Ackley also won the Eastern Dakota Conference championship, the Anderson/Stavn Invitational and the Shocky Strand Invitational. She placed fourth at the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships in 17:13.8.

A member of the National Honor Society and her school's Math Club, Ackley has volunteered locally on behalf of the Wild Hog Half Marathon. "It's a lot of pressure to line up and know everyone is expecting you to win, and that you have a target on your back in every race," said Grand Forks Central coach Sean Allan. "But Karly has handled the pressure and she goes into every race with individual goals and things to work on to keep improving."

Ackley has maintained a 4.31 weighted GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at Iowa State 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.

Two-time winner Ackley joins Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Mattie Shirley-Fairbairn (2015-16, Bismarck High School), Jordan Jacob (2013-14, Century High School), Brittany Brown Otter (2012-13, Bismarck High School), Tarin Lachowitz (2011-12, 2010-11 & 2009-10, Fargo Davies High School), Alissa Mears (2008-09, West Fargo High School), and Lindsay Anderson (2007-08, Leeds High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Ackley 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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