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**PUNAHOU SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE HAWAII BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 30, 2017) — In its 32nd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Connor Lehl of Punahou School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Hawaii Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Lehl is the first Gatorade Hawaii Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Punahou 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 Lehl as Hawaii's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Lehl 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.), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-10, 145-pound senior won the state meet this past season with a time of 17:42.34, breaking the tape 6.97 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Buff n' Blu to a second-place finish as a team. Lehl was the top Hawaiian finisher at the Nike Cross Nationals Northwest Regional championships, placing 106th. He was undefeated against in-state competition.

Lehl has volunteered locally at the Hawaii Shingon Mission and as a preschool aide. "Connor was dominant this season and has always been a hard-working and well-prepared runner," said Steve Jenness, head coach of Kamehameha School. Lehl has maintained a 3.61 GPA in the classroom.

He remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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.

Lehl joins Gatorade Hawaii Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Kaeo Kruse (2015-16 & 2014-15), Kamehameha Schools-Kapalama High School), Davis Kaahanui (2013-14 & 2012-13, Kamehameha Schools-Kapalama High School), Troy Esaki (2011-12, Iolani School), Jordan Thibodeau (2010-11, Kamehameha Schools-Kapalama High School), Pierce Murphy (2009-10, Island School), and Bryce Jenkins (2008-09 & 2007-08, Leilehua High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Lehl 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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