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**PEABODY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MASSACHUSETTS BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 30, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Marcelo Rocha of Peabody High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Massachusetts Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rocha is the first Gatorade Massachusetts Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Peabody 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 Rocha as Massachusetts'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, Rocha 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-9, 140-pound senior won the Division 1 state meet this past season with a course-record time of 15:38, breaking the tape 21 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Tanners to a third-place finish as a team. Rocha went unbeaten in 2016, but his season ended after the state meet because of an injury. The 2016 Boston Globe Division 1 Runner of the Year, he is a three-time Boston Herald and Globe All-Scholastic.

The secretary of the Peabody High senior class, Rocha has volunteered locally as a youth running coach and as part of multiple community service initiatives through his church. "It goes without saying that Marcelo is one of the best runners to ever come out of the North Shore of Massachusetts," said Brian Heenan, head coach of Marblehead High. "While his performance on the cross country course has impressed everyone, his humility has impressed me most."

Rocha has maintained an A average in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at Providence College 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.

Rocha joins Gatorade Massachusetts Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Viraj Deokar (2015-16, Middlesex School), Quinn Cooney (2014-15, Chelmsford High School), Mohamed Hussein (2013-14, Northfield Mount Hermon School), Jonathan Green (2012-13, St. John's High School), Wesley Gallagher (2011-12, Pembroke High School), John Murray (2010-11, Shrewsbury High School), Patrick McGowan (2009-10, Mansfield High School), Mike Moverman (2008-09, Oliver Ames High School), and Robert Gibson (2007-08, Brookline High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Rocha 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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