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**GEORGE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI 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 Giacomo DeLuca III of George County High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. DeLuca III is the first Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from George County 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 DeLuca III as Mississippi'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, DeLuca III 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-11, 145-pound senior won the MHSAA Class 6A state meet this past season, breaking the tape in 15:53 flat to finish 30.3 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Rebels to a 13th-place finish as a team. DeLuca clocked the fastest all-class time of the day at the state title meet and won his last four races of 2016. His state title-winning time was the fifth-fastest on Clinton's Choctaw Trails course in Mississippi prep history.

A member of the Mu Alpha Theta mathematics honors club as well as the Agricola Baptist Church band, DeLuca has volunteered locally as a coach for the George County Middle School track team in addition coaching youth soccer. He has also has donated his time to Operation Christmas Child as well as a school blood-donation drive. "Giacomo is by far the most talented boys high school distance runner to come out of Mississippi in more than a decade," said Long Beach High head coach Olan Welch. "He put a lot of hard work into his running this season. His 5K personal best improved greatly and he is most deserving of this selection."

DeLuca has maintained a 90.3 average 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.

DeLuca III joins Gatorade Mississippi Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year David Patton Little (2015-16, Starkville High School), Curt Knight (2014-15 & 2013-14, Jackson Academy), Will Murphey (2012-13, Oak Grove High School), Jordan Travis (2011-12, Poplarville High School), Chad Moore (2010-11, Oak Grove High School), and Max Holman (2009-10, 2008-09 & 2007-08, Tupelo High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, DeLuca III 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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