

**Contact: John Manzo (312-729-3656)**

**WADE HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA 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 John Ward of Wade Hampton High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Ward is the first Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Wade Hampton 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 Ward as South Carolina'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, Ward 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 6-foot-2, 150-pound senior raced to the Class 5A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:40. Ward also won the Eye Opener Invitational, the Cavalier Classic, the Greenville County championships and the Upper State championships, while placing 28th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships.

A devoted member of his church's youth ministry, Ward has volunteered locally on behalf of the Salvation Army, the Special Olympics and Operation Christmas Child. "John is the finest distance runner I've ever had at the school," said Wade Hampton coach Richard Zeller. "He works hard and he's very devoted to his teammates, and his family. He's continued to improve every year, and this year he matured greatly into a role as a leader."

Ward has maintained a 3.82 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.

Ward joins Gatorade South Carolina Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Jackson Ellenburg (2015-16, Ashley Ridge High School), Micah Williams (2014-15, Greer Middle College Charter High School), Brent Demarest (2013-14 & 2012-13, Porter-Gaud School), Roland Hakes (2011-12 & 2010-11, Dutch Fork High School), Aaron Ramirez (2009-10 & 2008-09, Woodmont High School), and Luke Lovelace (2007-08, Chapin High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Ward 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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