

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

**DOUGLAS FREEMAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE VIRGINIA 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 Waleed Suliman of Douglas Freeman High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Suliman is the first Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Douglas Freeman 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 Suliman as Virginia'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, Suliman 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, 130-pound senior won the Group 5A state meet this past season with a time of 15:13, breaking the tape 13 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor and leading the Rebels to a fourth-place finish as a team. Suliman also took fifth at the Foot Locker South Regional championships and finished 24th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships. He was undefeated against in-state competition.

Born in the Sudan, Suliman moved to a refugee camp in Jordan before relocating to the United States without knowing any English in 2014. He has volunteered locally with the Special Olympics and as part of multiple community-service initiatives with the Sudanese community in the Richmond area. "What makes Waleed great is that he is fearless and willing to go through any type of pain to win," said Drew Spicer, head coach of Deep Run High. "He can win in any number of ways, whether it's a big kick at the end or pushing the pace at the beginning to which no others around him can keep up."

Suliman has maintained a B 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.

Suliman joins Gatorade Virginia Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Drew Hunter (2015-16 & 2014-15, Loudoun Valley High School), Louis Colson (2013-14, Thomas Edison High School), Sean McGorty (2012-13, Chantilly High School), Ahmed Bile (2011-12 & 2010-11, Annandale High School), Kevin Dowd (2009-10, Fairfax High School), Thomas Porter (2008-09, Mountain View High School), and Jason Witt (2007-08, Midlothian High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Suliman 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).

###