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**LA FOLLETTE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE WISCONSIN 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 Finn Gessner of La Follette High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Gessner is the second Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from La Follette 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 Gessner as Wisconsin'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, Gessner 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 state's returning Gatorade Runner of the Year, the 5-foot-11, 148-pound senior took silver at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships this past season with a time of 15:04.4 to earn First Team All-American honors. Gessner also won the Nike Cross Nationals Heartland Regional championships. He earned his second-straight Division 1 state meet title in 15:22.13, a course record, breaking the tape 16.63 seconds ahead of his next-closest competitor.

A former ski jumper, Gessner has volunteered locally as part of multiple community-service initiatives through his church and has donated his time as a youth ski coach and running coach. "Finn's fall of 2016 was exceptional, one of the best the state has ever seen," said Joel Heroux, head coach of Oconomowoc High. "Winning the state meet handily and qualifying for both national championship meets is not an easy task."

Gessner has maintained a 3.50 GPA in the classroom. He has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Wisconsin 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.

Two-time winner Gessner joins Gatorade Wisconsin Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Olin Hacker (2014-15 & 2013-14, Madison West High School), Ryan Kromer (2012-13, Hudson High School), Chandler Diffe (2011-12, LaFollette High School), Dan Schubert (2010-11, Appleton East High School), Marcus Paulson (2009-10, Hamilton High School), Brett Kelly (2008-09, West High School), and Elliot Krause (2007-08, Appleton North High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Gessner 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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