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LAKE NORMAN CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE NORTH CAROLINA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 29, 2018) — In its 33rd year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced **Mariah Howlett of Lake Norman Charter School** as its **2017-18 Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Howlett is the first Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Lake Norman Charter 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 Howlett as North Carolina's best high school girls cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Howlett 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.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-6 senior overcame a stress fracture she suffered a year ago to break the tape at the NCHSAA 2A State Championships with a time of 18:03.43, leading the Knights to the state championship as a team. She also finished 20th at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships, crossing the line in 18:29.00. A double state track champion in the 1600 and 3200 last spring and Greater Charlotte's two-time Runner of the Year, Howlett clocked the state's fastest 5K time among prep girls in 2017 when she finished fourth at the Foot Locker South Regional championships in 17:29.00.

A member her church youth group since sixth grade, Howlett has volunteered locally on behalf of Operation Christmas Child and in association with an adopt-a-firehouse initiative. Also a Key Club participant, she has completed a three-week program living and working at Natural Bridge State Park in Virginia, serving as one of 10 girls who helped build and maintain trails, bridges and benches. In addition, Howlett has donated her time to Girls on the Run, a youth-empowerment program rooted in recreational running. "I can't think of another girls runner in the state who is more worthy," said Jerry Castro, head coach of North Lincoln High. "I've coached for 20 years in three states and Mariah is one of the most talented and successful prep athletes I've ever seen. I have watched her compete and beat us for four years now. I'm excited to see her graduate and move on! Mariah's character and sportsmanship are also second to none. It's been great for my team to watch and learn from her."

Howlett has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at North Carolina State University 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.

Howlett joins Gatorade North Carolina Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Nevada Mareno (2016-17 & 2015-16, Leesville Road High School), Elly Henes (2014-15, Green Hope High School), Kalya Montgomery (2013-14, Mount Tabor High School), Megan Sullivan (2012-13, Broughton High School), Sammy George (2011-12, Millbrook High School), Darby Middlebrook (2010-11, Watauga High School), Wesley Frazier (2009-10, Ravenscroft School) and Adrienne Soo (2008-09 & 2007-08, Durham Academy) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Howlett 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 the conversation on Twitter #GatoradePOY. 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 <http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com/>.

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