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**NORTHEAST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE FLORIDA BOYS TRACK & FIELD PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 22, 2017) — In its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Damion Thomas of Northeast High School as its 2016-17 Gatorade Florida Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year. Thomas is the first Gatorade Florida Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year to be chosen from Northeast 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 track, distinguishes Thomas as Florida's best high school boys track & field athlete. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year award to be announced in June, Thomas joins an elite alumni association of state track & field award-winners, including Lolo Jones (1997-98, Roosevelt High School, Iowa), Allyson Felix (2002-03, Los Angeles Baptist High School, Calif.), Robert Griffin III (2006-07, Copperas Cove High School, Texas), Grant Fisher (2013-14 & 2014-15, Grand Blanc High School, Mich.) and Candace Hill (2014-15, Rockdale County High School, Ga.).

The state's returning Gatorade Boys Track & Field Athlete of the Year, the 6-foot-2, 170-pound senior clocked a time of 13.43 seconds to break the tape in the 110-meter hurdles at April's Texas Relays, which ranked as the nation's No. 4 time among prep competitors this season at the time of his selection. Thomas won the 110 hurdles at the Class 3A state meet with a time of 13.94. A three-time 110 hurdles title-winner at the Golden South Classic, he was also the 2016 Jamaican Junior National Champion in the event. Thomas holds the 14- and 15-year-old age group national record in the 110.

Having served in student government, Thomas has donated his time tutoring fellow student-athletes in chemistry, geometry and Algebra 2. He has also volunteered locally as a meet official at AAU track meets in addition to helping coordinate school activities like dances and spirit week. Thomas was selected to represent Northeast High at statewide student leadership conference. "Damion has displayed impeccable qualities of leadership and personality over the past four years, which is why he was a co-captain beginning in his sophomore year," said Northeast High School head coach Kevin Hanson. "His work ethic is second to none and the tougher the situation gets, the more his performance rises to the occasion. Damion exemplifies a true student-athlete and all-around champion."

Thomas has maintained a B average in the classroom and has signed a national letter of intent to compete on an athletic scholarship at Louisiana State University beginning 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 Thomas joins Gatorade Florida Boys Track & Field Athletes of the Year Samson Moore (2014-15, Gaither High School), Kendal Williams (2013-14, Stanton College Preparatory School), Trayvon Bromell (2012-13, Gibbs High School), Arman Hall (2011-12, St. Thomas Aquinas High School), Armando del Valle (2010-11, Columbus High School), Cody Riggs (2009-10, St. Thomas Aquinas High School), Neamen Wise (2008-09, Lake Brantley High School), Jeff Demps (2007-08, South Lake High School), and Justin Harbor (2006-07, Flagler Palm Coast High School) among the state's list of former award winners.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Damion 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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