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**NORTHLAND PREPARATORY ACADEMY STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE ARIZONA 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 Maya Smith of Northland Preparatory Academy as its 2017-18 Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Smith is the first Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Northland Preparatory Academy.

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 Smith as Arizona'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, Smith 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-4 senior raced to the Division 4 individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:01, leading the Spartans to the state title as a team. Smith placed second at the Nike Cross Nationals Southwest Regional championships and finished 32nd nationally at the NXN Final. Smith also earned victories at the Four Corners Invitational, the Peaks Invitational and the Desert Twilight Festival.

Vice President of her school's Student Council, Smith has volunteered locally on behalf of the Flagstaff Family Food Center. "Maya set tough running goals and went after them in each race with incredible discipline and tenacity," said Northland Prep head coach Missy Acker. "When it was time to race, a ferocious competitor would come from within."

Smith has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She 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.

Smith joins Gatorade Arizona Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Allie Schadler (2016-17 & 2015-16, Rio Rico High School), Dani Jones (2014-15 & 2013-14, Desert Vista High School), Sarah Fakler (2012-13, 2011-12 & 2010-11, Xavier College Prep.), Jessica Tonn (2009-10 & 2008-09, Xavier College Prep.), and Nadya Bishton (2007-08, Mountain Ridge) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Smith 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/>.