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**LAKE HAMILTON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ARKANSAS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 29, 2018) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Josie Carson of Lake Hamilton High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Carson was the first Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Lake Hamilton High School when she won her first honor her junior year (2016-17).

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 Carson as Arkansas' 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, Carson 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 state's returning Gatorade Runner of the Year, the 5-foot-6 senior won the Class 6A state meet for the fourth straight year this past season with a time of 19:18.9, breaking the tape 11.6 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Wolves to a third-place finish as a team. A four-time Class 6A First Team All-State selection, Carson won seven of 10 races in 2017 and was the top Arkansas finisher at the Nike Cross Nationals South Regional, placing 28th in 19:14.16.

A flautist in the school band, Carson is a member of the Lake Hamilton High student council and the vice president of her class. She has volunteered locally as a teacher's aide at St. John's Catholic School and as a youth volleyball coach. "Josie is a strong, smart runner," said Jim Andrews, head coach of Greenwood High. "She knows how to work the runners around her to her benefit. She always seems to be improving to get to that next level."

Carson has maintained a weighted 4.21 GPA in the classroom and ranks No. 1 in her class. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at the University of Arkansas 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 Carson joins Gatorade Arkansas Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Elise Reina (2015-16 & 2014-15, Har-Ber High School), Kyandra Chandler (2013-14, Nettleton High School), Maggie Montoya (2012-13 & 2011-12, Rogers High School), Valerie Reina (2010-11, Har-Ber High School), Erika Setzler (2009-10, Conway), Grace Heymsfield (2008-09 & 2007-08, Elkins High School), as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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