

Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729- 3685)

**COLQUITT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE GEORGIA 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 Elizabeth Funderburk of Colquitt County High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Georgia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Funderburk is the first Gatorade Georgia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Colquitt County 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 Funderburk as Georgia'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, Funderburk 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-5 senior won the USATF Georgia HS XC Meet of Champions this past season with a time of 17:38.77, breaking the tape 12.4 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor. Funderburk also captured GHSA Class 7A State Cross Country Championships title, clocking the fastest all-class time of the day at 18:29.12. She won eight of nine races on the season.

A member of her Trinity Baptist Church youth group, Funderburk has volunteered locally for Operation Christmas Child, UNICEF and the Special Olympics in addition to fundraising for the Humane Society. She has also donated her time to the Whelchel and Carlton law office helping with office tasks, the Vereen Rehabilitation Center and a soup kitchen. "Elizabeth was one of the great stories showcasing perseverance in 2017—not only in Georgia, but throughout the country," said Erik Boal, editor of DyeStat.com. "After placing 11th, 45th and 93rd her previous three seasons at the state finals, Elizabeth captured an individual championship, and left no doubt in winning by nearly a minute. She also demonstrated tremendous resilience in winning the Georgia Meet of Champions after not qualifying for the meet the year before."

Funderburk has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at Florida 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.

Funderburk joins Gatorade Georgia Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Nicole Fegans (2016-17, Landmark Christian School), Lindsay Billings (2015-16, Northview High School), Emma Grace Hurley (2014-15, Fellowship Christian School), Kathryn Foreman (2013-14, Landmark Christian School), Allie Buchalski (2012-13, Johns Creek High School), Grace Tinkey (2011-12 & 2010-11, First Presbyterian Day School), Nicky Akande (2009-10, Collins Hill High School), Amanda Winslow (2008-09, Collins Hill High School), and Emily Reese (2007-08, Chamblee High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Funderburk 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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