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**NORTHERN HIGHLANDS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE NEW JERSEY 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 Monica Hebner of Northern Highlands Regional High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Hebner is the first Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Northern Highlands Regional 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 Hebner as New Jersey'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, Hebner 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-2 senior raced to victory at the state Meet of Champions this past season with a time of 18:13. Hebner took fourth at the Nike Cross Nationals Northeast Regional championships and placed second at the Group 3 state meet. She also broke the tape at the Shore Coaches Invitational, the Sectional championships and the Bergen County Meet of Champions.

Hebner has volunteered as a peer tutor in her school. "Combine determination, endless energy, dignity, integrity and a smile that can light up a room and you get Monica Hebner," said Northern Highlands coach Frank Gilli. "She's been a top Bergen County runner since her freshman year and she's probably the top runner in the school's history."

Hebner has maintained a weighted 4.31 GPA in the classroom. She will attend the University of Pennsylvania this fall, where she will compete in cross country and track and field.

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.

Hebner joins Gatorade New Jersey Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Alyssa Aldridge (2016-17 & 2015-16, Mainland Regional High School), Eve Glasergreen (2014-15, North Hunterdon High School), Briana Gess (2013-14, Haddonfield Memorial High School), Sarah Disanza (2012-13, High Point Regional High School), Holly Bischof (2011-12, Bishop Eustace Preparatory School), Megan Venables (2010-11, Highland Regional High School), Chelsea Ley (2009-10, Kingsway Regional High School), and Melanie Thompson (2008-09 & 2007-08, Voorhees High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Hebner 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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