

Contact: Kelsey Rhoney (312-729- 3685)

**MANDAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE NORTH DAKOTA 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 Kelby Rinas of Mandan High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Rinas is the first Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Mandan 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 Rinas as North Dakota'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, Rinas 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 sophomore raced to the Class A individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:15.8. Rinas also won the Western Dakota Association championship and broke the tape at the Anderson/Stavn Invitational, the Mandan Kiwanis Meet, the Becki Wells Invitational and the Minot Souris Valley Invitational.

A member of her school's Leadership Club, Rinas has donated her time by making blankets for a local hospital. "Kelby is a very dedicated and determined runner who is always willing to put in as much work as it takes to reach her goals," said Mandan coach Hilary Feist. "She pushes herself every day to improve."

Rinas has maintained a 3.35 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her junior year of high school 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.

Rinas joins Gatorade North Dakota Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Karly Ackley (2016-17 & 2014-15, Grand Forks Central High School), Mattie Shirley-Fairbairn (2015-16, Bismarck High School), Jordan Jacob (2013-14, Century High School), Brittany Brown Otter (2012-13, Bismarck High School), Tarin Lachowitz (2011-12, 2010-11 & 2009-10, Davies High School), Alissa Mears (2008-09, West Fargo High School), and Lindsay Anderson (2007-08, Leeds High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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