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**SOUTH KINGSTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE RHODE ISLAND 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 Ellie Lawler of South Kingstown High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Lawler is the first Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from South Kingstown 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 Lawler as Rhode Island'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, Lawler 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 three -time returning Gatorade Runner of the Year, the 5-foot-8 senior won the state meet for the third consecutive season with a time of 17:44.26, breaking the tape 8.9 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Rebels to a fourth-place finish as a team. A three-time First Team All-State selection, Lawler placed eighth at the Foot Locker Northeast Regional championships before earning All-American honors with a 15th-place finish at the national championships.

A class officer at South Kingstown High, Lawler has volunteered locally as a lifeguard and as part of multiple community-service initiatives through her church. "It is Ellie's ability to run a very aggressive first mile to establish the pace of the race that sets her apart," said John Marchand, head coach of Smithfield High. "Most runners that try to go out with her simply cannot hold the pace. She is one of the best female cross country runners ever to come out of Rhode Island."

Lawler has maintained a weighted 4.56 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to run cross country on scholarship at Syracuse 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.

Three-time winner Lawler joins Gatorade Rhode Island Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Emma McMillan (2014-15, 2013-14 & 2012-13, Barrington High School), Molly Keating (2011-12 & 2010-11, La Salle Academy), Abigail Jones (2009-10, Barrington High School), Jenna Riley (2008-09, Coventry High School), and Jeanne Mack (2007-08, La Salle Academy) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Lawler 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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