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**ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE SOUTH CAROLINA 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 Ava Dobson of St. Joseph's Catholic High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade South Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Dobson is the first Gatorade South Carolina Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from St. Joseph's Catholic 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 Dobson as South Carolina'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, Dobson 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-6 sophomore raced to the Class 2A individual state championship this past season with a time of 18:35, leading the Knights to the state title as a team. Dobson also won the Wendy's Invitational, the Eye Opener Invitational and the Starlight Reservation Run. She took 16th at the Foot Locker South Regional championships.

Dobson has volunteered locally on behalf of Triune Mercy Center, Meals on Wheels and a summer camp for special needs children. "Ava had never run a timed race until our first cross country meet this past August," said St. Joseph's coach Marie Kernell. "She had no experience or strategy, other than to run hard, and she won that first race with the fastest time in the state at that point in the season. She's a coach's dream student-athlete."

Dobson has maintained an A average 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.

Dobson joins Gatorade South Carolina Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Cate Ambrose (2016-17, Riverside High School), Logan Morris (2015-16, 2014-15 & 2012-13, Spartanburg Christian Academy), Ashbrook Gwinn (2013-14, Aiken High School), Meredith Kilburn (2011-12, Fort Mill High School), Sinead Haughey (2010-11 & 2009-10, Daniel High School), Tameka Jackson (2008-09, Seneca High School), and Mary Kate DuBard (2007-08, Northwestern High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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