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**RIPLEY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA 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 Tori Starcher of Ripley High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Starcher is the first Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Ripley 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 Starcher as West Virginia'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, Starcher 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 sophomore won the Group AAA state meet title this past season with a meet-record time of 17:34.98, breaking the tape 20 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Vikings to a seventh-place finish as a team. Starcher took second at the Foot Locker South Regional championships to qualify for the national championships, where she finished 29th as the third West Virginia female in history to participate in the national final. She won nine of 11 races and was unbeaten against in-state opponents in 2017.

A member of the Ripley High student council, Starcher established the Ripley Youth Running Club, which promotes running skills and physical fitness. She has also volunteered locally as part of multiple community-service projects through her church youth group. "Tori takes control of every race," said Jason Evans, head coach of Parkersburg South High. "She is a very confident and poised runner, but she almost always has a smile on her face. It does not look like work for her."

Starcher has maintained a weighted 4.10 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.

Starcher joins Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year TaShala Turner (2016-17, University High School), Jessica Melvin (2015-16, Philip Barbour High School), Peyton Panger (2014-15, Capital High School), Amelia Paladino (2013-14, University High School), Maggie Drazba (2012-13 & 2011-12, St. Marys High School), Sarah McCauley (2010-11, Philip Barbour High School), Alex Dent (2009-10, Hurricane High School), Letitia Propst (2008-09, Elkins High School), and Letitia Propst (2007-08, Elkins High School) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

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