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**HOMEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE ALABAMA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (February 12, 2018) — In its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Will Stone of Homewood High School as its 2017-18 Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year. Stone is the first Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Homewood 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 field, distinguishes Stone as Alabama's best high school boys cross country runner. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year award to be announced in January, Stone 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.), Donn Cabral (2007-08, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley, Naperville, Ill.).

The 5-foot-8, 130-pound junior raced to his second consecutive Class 6A individual state championship this past season with a time of 15:46.2, leading the Patriots to the state title as a team. The state's returning Gatorade Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, Stone also won the Jesse Owens Classic, the Spain Park Invitational and the Chickasaw Trails Invitational. He took 21st at the Foot Locker South Regional championships.

A devoted member of his church youth group and a talented musician, Stone has volunteered locally on behalf of the Beta Club, the Key Club and the Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs. "Will is an unbelievable competitor," said Homewood coach Lars Porter. "He trains hard and he's dedicated to improving, and his character matches his accomplishments."

Stone has maintained a 4.16 GPA in the classroom. He will begin his senior 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.

Two-time winner Stone joins Gatorade Alabama Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Cole Stidfole (2015-16, Oak Mountain High School), Ben Bryant (2014-15, Opelika High School), Mac Macoy (2013-14, Vestavia Hills High School), Payton Ballard (2012-13, Mountain Brook High School), Griffin Lee (2011-12, John Carroll Catholic High School), Brandon Hazouri (2010-11, Spain Park High School), Nathan Lewis (2009-10, Cold Springs), and Patrick McGregor (2008-09 & 2007-08, Hoover) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a Gatorade Player of the Year, Stone 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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