

**NATICK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MASSACHUSETTS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (January 28, 2019) — In its 34<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, today announced Grace Connolly of Natick High School as its 2018-19 Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Connolly is the first Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Natick 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 Connolly as Massachusetts' 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 February, Connolly joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Lukas Verzbicas (2010-11, 2009-10 Carl Sandburg High School, Orland Park, Ill.), Megan Goethals (2009-10, Rochester High School, Rochester Hills, Mich.), Jordan Hasay (2008-09, Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School, San Luis Obispo, Calif.) and Chris Derrick (2007-08, Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, Ill.).

The state's two-time returning Gatorade Runner of the Year, the 5-foot-8 senior won the Division 1 state meet this past season with a time of 18:14.28, breaking the tape 1:04.70 ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the RedHawks to a first-place finish as a team. Connolly earned All-American status by placing eighth at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships. The two-time Boston Globe Division 1 Runner of the Year, she holds nine school records and nine cross country course records.

Connolly was the lead student coordinator of Natick High's participation in the 2018 Special Olympics. She has volunteered locally as a peer tutor and youth running coach, and has donated her time to multiple fundraising campaigns to benefit cancer research. "Grace Connolly was phenomenal this season," said Kate Tenforde, head coach of Milton High School. "I'm always impressed by her work ethic. She never eases up in a race."

Connolly has maintained an A average in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at Stanford 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 Connolly joins Gatorade Massachusetts Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Ariel Keklak (2015-16, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School), Erin Dietz (2014-15, Bedford High School), and Anoush Shehadeh (2013-14, Phillips Academy) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Connolly has the opportunity to award a \$1,000 grant to a local or national youth sports organization of her choosing. She is also eligible to submit an essay to win one of twelve \$10,000 spotlight grants for the organization of choice, which will be announced throughout the year.

Since the program's inception in 1985, Gatorade Player of the Year award recipients have won hundreds of professional and college championships, and many have also turned into pillars in their communities, becoming coaches, business owners and educators.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit [www.Gatorade.com/POY](http://www.Gatorade.com/POY), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY](http://www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Gatorade](http://www.twitter.com/Gatorade).