

**LEE'S SUMMIT WEST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED  
GATORADE MISSOURI 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 Ginger Murnieks of Lee's Summit West High School as its 2018-19 Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year. Murnieks is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Lee's Summit West 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 Murnieks as Missouri'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 February, Murnieks 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 5-foot-2 senior broke the tape at the MSHSAA Class 4 State Championships, clocking the fastest all-class time of the day in 18:35.78 to finish 26.68 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor. Unbeaten by a Missouri girl all season, Murnieks won six of seven races last fall and ran the state's only sub-18 time by a girl with a 17:53.30 at the Class 4 sectionals. She also finished 34th at the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships in 18:29.70.

A senior-year transfer from Oregon, Murnieks has donated her time in Salem, Oregon, by serving dinner at Simonka Place women's shelter and playing piano for Restored Church of Christ, as well as area retirement homes there. In association with the RCC's youth group, she also donated her time roofing and painting for those in need, performing yard work for the elderly, and fundraising to provide presents for children during the holiday season. She also coached youth soccer and served as a peer tutor before moving to Missouri. Murnieks has since joined the Adult/Youth Choir at South Chrysler Restoration church in Independence. "Ginger has been a great addition to our team after transferring to Lee's Summit West from Sprague, Oregon," said Titans head coach Jesse Griffin. "She has been a huge leader on our team and is highly respected by the other girls and the coaches on our staff. Winning Missouri's big - class state meet is the highlight of her career."

Murnieks has maintained a weighted 4.11 GPA in the classroom. She has signed a National Letter of Intent to compete in cross country and track and field on scholarship at the University of Missouri 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.

Murnieks joins Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Tori Findley (2017-18 & 2016-17, Blue Springs South High School), Taylor Werner (2015-16 & 2013-14, Ste. Genevieve High School), and Hannah Long (2014-15, Eureka High School) 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," Murnieks 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).

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