

ROCK BRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE MISSOURI GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 27, 2020) — In its 35th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Carolyn Ford of Rock Bridge High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Ford is the first Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Rock Bridge 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 Ford 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, Ford 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 first-ever freshman girl to win the Class 4 state title, 5-foot-3 distance talent broke the tape in the championship race this past season, clocking a personal-best time of 18:08.60 and setting a girls all-class 5K record on the Gans Creek Cross Country Course. She also posted impressive victories earlier in the fall at the prestigious Gans Creek Classic (18:40.30) and the Class 4, District 7 championships (18:11.80), setting a course record in both races. Ford was runner-up in the first two meets of her high school career, then ripped off six straight wins to spark Rock Bridge's run to a second-place team finish in their class. Undefeated against Missouri competition in 2019, she finished 37th at the Nike Cross Nationals Midwest Regional championships in November, crossing the line in 18:23.60.

A participant in the Crossings student ministry organization, Ford is a member of the Rock Bridge High band and also practices martial arts. "Carolyn set an all-class course record at the state championships and went unbeaten against Missouri girls last fall," said Erik Boal, editor for DyeStat.com. "She's not even halfway through her high school career and it seems like the sky's the limit for her."

Ford has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She will begin her sophomore 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 and field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. From the 12 national winners, one male and one female athlete are each named Gatorade High School Athlete of the Year. In all, 607 athletes are honored each year.

Ford joins recent Gatorade Missouri Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year Ginger Murnieks (2018-19, Lee's Summit West High School), Tori Findley (2017-18 & 2016-17, Blue Springs South High School), Taylor Werner (2015-16, Ste. Genevieve High School) and Hannah Long (2014-15, Eureka High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Ford 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, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GatoradePOY or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/Gatorade.