

## **MORGANTOWN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED GATORADE WEST VIRGINIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR**

**CHICAGO** (January 27, 2020) — In its 35<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company today announced **Lea Hatcher of Morgantown High School** as its **2019-20 Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Hatcher is the first Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Morgantown 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 Hatcher 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 February, Hatcher 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-4 sophomore won the Class AAA state meet this past season with a time of 17:24.78, breaking the tape 9.93 seconds ahead of her next-closest competitor and leading the Mohigans to the state team title. Hatcher was also the top West Virginia finisher at the Nike Cross Nationals Finals and placed third at the Nike Cross Nationals Southeast Regional championships.

Hatcher has volunteered locally with the United Way and has donated her time with multiple community service initiatives through her church. "Lea is a runner of exceptional talent and desire," said Ed Frohnapfel, head coach of University High. "As she is only a sophomore, she will have several opportunities to add to her title count."

Hatcher has maintained a 4.0 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 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.

Hatcher joins recent Gatorade West Virginia Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year Madison Trippett (2018-19, Parkersburg High School), Tori Starcher (2017-18, Ripley High School), TaShala Turner (2016-17, University High School), Jessica Melvin (2015-16, Philip Barbour High School) and Peyton Panger (2014-15, Capital High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

As a part of Gatorade's cause marketing platform "Play it Forward," Hatcher 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).