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NORTH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE INDIANA BOYS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

CHICAGO (January 23, 2012) — In its 27th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with ESPNHS, today announced **Futsum Zeinasellassie of North Central HS** as its **2011-12 Gatorade Indiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Zeinasellassie is the first Gatorade Indiana Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from North Central HS.

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 Zeinasellassie as Indiana'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, Zeinasellassie joins an elite alumni association of past state award-winners in 12 sports, including Ryan Hall (1999-00, 2000-01, Big Bear HS, Calif.), Derek Jeter (1991-92, Kalamazoo HS, Mich.), Candace Parker (2001-02, Naperville Central HS, Ill.), Kevin Garnett (1992-93, Maudlin HS, S.C.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-8 senior raced to the Nike Cross Nationals championship this past season with a course-record time of 15:02.41. The state's returning Gatorade Boys Cross Country Runner of the Year, Zeinasellassie also won his third consecutive individual state championship in a course-record 14:48.8, by a meet-record margin of 44 seconds. He broke the tape at the NXN Midwest Regional championships in 15:42.8, the Foot Locker Midwest Regional championship in 14:58 and finished second at the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships with a time of 14:52.1.

Zeinasellassie has maintained a B average in the classroom. A devoted member of his church community, he has volunteered with youth track programs and raised funds to benefit a school in Kenya.

"Futsum certainly had one of the finest seasons any prep harrier has had," said ESPNHS Dyestat Senior Editor Steve Underwood. "In his biggest races before a one-second loss at Foot Locker nationals, he produced stunning performances: Beating a course record held by two-time Gatorade National Runner of the Year Lukas Verzbicas in his dominant state meet triumph, then breaking the Nike Cross Nationals Final meet record in Portland— where he also enjoyed the biggest margin of victory in meet history. Only Verzbicas has won both national meets (in a single season) and the fact that Futsum came within a second of doing so as well, speaks volumes."

Zeinasellassie remains undecided upon a collegiate destination.

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 ESPNHS and the Gatorade high school sports leadership team, 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.

Zeinasellassie joins Gatorade Indiana Boys Cross Country Runners of the Year Tyler Byrne (2009-10, North Harrison), Drew Shields (2008-09, Fishers), and Mike Fout (2007-08, LaPorte) as athletes who have won the cross country award since its inception in 2007.

To keep up to date on the latest happenings, become a fan of Gatorade Player of the Year on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. 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 playeroftheyear.gatorade.com.

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