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## SIMI VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUT NAMED GATORADE CALIFORNIA GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER OF THE YEAR

**CHICAGO** (January 10, 2013) — In its 28<sup>th</sup> year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, The Gatorade Company, in collaboration with USA TODAY High School Sports, today announced **Sarah Baxter of Simi Valley High School** as its **2012-13 Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year**. Baxter is the first Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year to be chosen from Simi Valley 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 Baxter as California'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 January, Baxter 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.), Abby Wambach (1997-98, Our Lady of Mercy, N.Y.) and Mark Sanchez (2004-05, Mission Viejo HS, Calif.).

The 5-foot-6 junior raced to her second consecutive Nike Cross Nationals championship this past season with a time of 19:17. The state's two-time returning Gatorade Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year, Baxter was unbeaten on the season and captured the Division 1 state championship in a course record 16:40. She also broke course records at the Mt. SAC Invitational, the Woodbridge Invitational, the Marmonte League Championships and the Southern Section Championships.

Baxter has maintained a 3.15 GPA in the classroom. She has volunteered locally at a charity thrift store and on behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary.

"Sarah Baxter's season was just for the ages," said Steve Underwood, DyeStat.com editor for Runnerspace.com. "Many of the greatest prep harriers of all time have been Californians—like Julia Stamps, Amber Trotter, Jordan Hasay and more—and you can argue now that Sarah tops them all. You can't get much better in the Golden State than setting course records at Mt. SAC and Woodward Park (state meet). And on a day where times went out the window, Sarah defended her NXN title against the best field of the season."

Baxter will begin her senior 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 & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade high school sports leadership team in partnership with [USA TODAY High School Sports](#), 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.

Baxter joins Gatorade California Girls Cross Country Runners of the Year Molly Grabill (2009-10, Rancho Bernardo) and Jordan Hasay (2008-09 & 2007-08, Mission College Prep.) 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](http://playeroftheyear.gatorade.com).

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